ELEGIAC RHETORICS: FROM LOSS TO DIALOGUE IN LYRIC POETRY

A Dissertation

by

SARAH ELIZABETH HART

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2012

Major Subject: English

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	M. Jimmie Killingsworth
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ABSTRACT

Elegiac Rhetorics: From Loss to Dialogue in Lyric Poetry. (August 2012)

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By reading mournful poems rhetorically, I expand the concept of the elegy in order to reveal continuities between private and communal modes of mourning. My emphasis on readers of elegies challenges writer-centered definitions of the elegy, like that given by Peter Sacks, who describes how the elegy's formal conventions express the elegist's own motives for writing. Although Sacks's Freudian approach helpfully delineates some of the consoling effects that writing poetry has on the elegist herself, this dissertation revises such writer-centered concepts of the elegy by asking how elegies rhetorically invoke ethical relationships between writers and readers. By reading elegiac poems through Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theories and Emmanuel Levinas's ethics, I argue that these poems characterize, as Levinas suggests, subjectivity as fundamentally structured by ethical relationships with others.

In keeping with this ethical focus, I analyze anthology poems, meaning short lyric poems written by acclaimed authors, easily accessible, and easily remembered—including several well-known poems by such authors as Emily Dickinson, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Robert Frost. Anthology pieces invite ethical evaluation in part because they represent what counts as valuable poetry—and also, by implication, what

does not. Because anthology poems are read by broad, diverse audiences, I suggest that a rhetorical methodology focusing on writer-reader relationships is essential to evaluating these poems' ethical implications.

This rhetorical approach to poetry, however, questions rhetoricians and aesthetic theorists from Aristotle and Longinus to Lloyd F. Bitzer and Derek Attridge who emphasize distinctions between rhetoric and poetics. I address the ongoing debate about the relationship between rhetoric and poetics by arguing, along the lines of Wayne C. Booth's affirmation that fiction and rhetoric are interconnected, that poetry and rhetoric are likewise integrally tied. To this debate, I add an emphasis on philosophy—from which Plato, Ramus, and others exclude rhetoric and poetry—as likewise essential to understanding both poetry and rhetoric. By recognizing the interrelatedness of these disciplines, we may better clarify poetry's broad, ethical appeals that seem so valuable to readers in situations of loss.

DEDICATION

For my family, for whose generous support I am most grateful

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I am quite fortunate to have had such helpful support from my family, friends, and professors throughout my graduate school career. I greatly appreciate the guidance and support of my committee chair, Dr. Killingsworth, and my committee members, Dr. Swearingen, Dr. Eide, and Dr. Radzik, who so generously shared their expertise not only during the development of this dissertation, but also since I first started graduate school. In helping me refine and improve my scholarship, they have also made the process even more pleasurable and meaningful. I am very grateful for Dr. Killingsworth's always prompt and practical responses to my work, and especially for his commitment to helping me to enjoy writing.

Having grown up in a literary family, I am not quite certain at which moment other people started helping me to think through the ideas developed in this dissertation. My family has always encouraged my love of literature, and kernels of my ongoing conversations with them persist in this dissertation. I am especially grateful for my family's generous support of my graduate work, which provided an invaluable opportunity to refine my ideas and responses to our conversations. And finally, I would like to thank Kevin for listening patiently and responding so caringly.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: ETHICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN RHETORIC AND POETICS

Poetry, Rhetoric, and Mourning

"Márgarét, áre you grieving/Over Goldengrove unleaving? . . . It is the blight man was born for,/It is Margaret you mourn for" (G. Hopkins, "Spring and Fall" lines 1-2, 13-14). Gerard Manley Hopkins's poem "Spring and Fall" (hereafter cited as "Spring") suggests that mourning for others implies mourning for oneself, grieving for one's own losses. Hopkins's emphasis on the mournful self, however, contrasts strongly with Pericles's emphasis on the mournful community. In his famous funeral oration, Pericles addresses mourners at Athens's public burial for her first fallen soldiers of the Peloponnesian War: "So died these men as became Athenians. You, their survivors, must determine to have as unfaltering a resolution in the field, though you may pray that it may have a happier issue" (Thucydides). Hopkins and Pericles illustrate that poetry, in the genre of the elegy, and rhetoric, in the genre of the eulogy or funeral oration, both have long and venerable traditions of reflecting on loss.

Elegiac and rhetorical modes of mourning in fact share a common history, as C. Jan Swearingen explains in "Song to Speech: The Origins of Early Epitaphia in Ancient Near Eastern Women's Lamentations." Funeral orations like Pericles's originated in the

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songs of mourning and praise sung by women in the ancient Near East (Swearingen, "Song to Speech" 213-214). Jeffrey Walker affirms that "what comes to be called the art of rhetoric . . . in fact originates . . . from an expansion of the poetic/epideictic realm"—and both poetry and rhetoric were preceded by song (18). The term "*poiêsis*," connoting "doing" or "making," emerged from "*aoidê*," meaning "song," but the terms "*rhêtor*" and "*technê rhêtorikê*" did not arise until almost a century later (Walker 19, 26). Swearingen traces the development of mourning songs into epitaphia and funeral orations as a result of historical influences like the advent of literacy, the increasing prevalence of patriarchal values and individualism, and women's removal from public rituals and positions of power ("Song to Speech" 217).

The genre of the funeral oration emerged in opposition to women's songful lamentations. For example, the funeral oration given at the Athenian burial ground, Kerameikos, portrays "the war hero-citizen" as an offspring not of human parents, but of the polis itself, defining the burial ground, its fallen warriors—and the oration itself—as public, masculine, and exclusive of "the lamentations of women, hymns, and the poets' lies" (Swearingen, "Song to Speech" 220-221). In contrast, Swearingen finds Aspasia's speech in Plato's *Menexenos* challenging the masculine publicity of such funeral rhetoric. Like Pericles and other funeral orators, Aspasia eulogizes fallen war-heroes, but she acknowledges these men's personal connections and upbringing—while, as Swearingen points out, teaching her audience about rhetoric:

> How could we praise these valiant men, who in their lifetime delighted their friends by their virtue, and purchased the safety of the living by their

> deaths? We ought, in my judgment, to adopt the natural order in our praise, even as the men themselves were natural in their virtue. First, then, let us eulogize their nobility of birth, and second their nurture and training: then we shall exhibit the character of their exploits, how nobly and worthily they wrought them. (Jowett qtd. in Swearingen, "Song to Speech" 223)

Like Pericles, Aspasia eulogizes Athen's fallen warriors, but her personal terms like "friends" and her references to their "nurture and training" seem to synthesize public and private, masculine and feminine dichotomies. As Swearingen points out, the rhetorical tradition "silenced" Aspasia and her female counterparts ("Song to Speech" 223). This historical division between public and private rhetorics of mourning not only excluded women and other non-citizens from public rituals and forms of expression, but also seems to have invalidated certain modes of mourning, like lyric expressions of grief.

Such contentions about who gets to mourn and how are still rife within America today. For example, in "Spontaneous Memorials and Contemporary Modes of Mourning in America," Erika Doss describes conflicts over roadside memorials, which are banned in some states (Massachusetts, Missouri, Oregon, and Wisconsin) and regulated in others (Colorado, Florida, Texas, Virginia, and Wyoming) (303). When Rodney Lyle Scott took offense at a Christian roadside memorial he passed on his way to work, he took it upon himself to remove the crosses and flowers (Doss 303). The family who had constructed the memorial honoring their lost loved one sued, but the case was dismissed when Scott's attorney questioned the use of "public lands to endorse religion" (Doss

303). What count as appropriate—and legal—ways of grieving and mourning in public continues to be debated today.

Doss also interrogates the pressing issue of "who is valued as a person worth mourning and remembering," an issue still hotly debated today, as evident in the aftermath of the Columbine High School shooting (295). When carpenter Greg Zanis constructed fifteen wooden crosses on a hill by Columbine High School to commemorate both the thirteen victims who were killed and the two shooters, public dispute ensued (Doss 311). Some people left demeaning messages (like "'evil bastard' and 'unrepentant murderer'") on the killers' crosses, and physical fighting broke out between mourners' visiting the victims' crosses and those visiting the killers' crosses (Doss 311). The father of one of the student victims, Brian Rohrbough, removed the killers' crosses only two days after their construction, complaining that "it was an outrage to use a Christian symbol to honor the murderers at a victims' site" (Lowe and Guy qtd. in Doss 311). Rohrbough also helped relatives of another student victim chop down two of the fifteen trees planted by a local church to memorialize everyone who died in the tragic event (Doss 312). While Zanis viewed the killers as "victims of society," sharing the church's recognition of them as worthy of commemoration like the people they killed, Rohrbough and other mourners saw the killers as "undeserving of any form of commemoration or consideration"—as if through their brutal actions they had divested themselves of personhood worthy of mourning (Gray qtd. in Doss 311; Doss 311-312). Doss shows that what counts as lost personhood or subjectivity deserving of

grief is constructed and in part projected onto individuals by their companions and communities.

Constructions and projections of personhood are also evident in Doss's account of mourning rituals surrounding pregnancy and infant losses, like the uses of "memory boxes" and "burial cradles" to commemorate lost fetuses and infants (Fein qtd. in Doss 304; Layne qtd. in Doss 304). Doss explains that "fetal personhood" is also constructed by antiabortion memorials, like the Memorial Wall for the Unborn at the Sacred Heart of Mary Catholic Church in Boulder Colorado, under which are buried the ashes of thousands of aborted fetuses (304-305).[1] These fetuses and infants are constructed as persons or subjects worthy of mourning by the church and/or by their parents and families. Similarly, Doss claims that the memorial NAMES quilt restructures both "American subjectivity" and "American modes of mourning" by incorporating "queers" and AIDS patients into "the national narrative" as persons whose deaths are worthy of mourning (Doss 313). These contemporary modes of mourning determine who does and does not count as a person worth mourning—and worth recognizing as a fellow citizen of the community—much like the transition from lamentations to funeral orations in ancient cultures determined who could and could not mourn publicly. Mourning rituals still partially determine whom we do and do not recognize as people—and rhetoric and poetry both play a role shaping these recognitions.

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1. The ashes were obtained from a mortuary that broke its contract with the Boulder Abortion Clinic not to permit the use of the ashes in "any religious or political ceremonies" (Doss 305).

Lyric poetry constructs and projects subjects worth mourning and subjects who can and cannot mourn. For example, both Christina Rossetti and John Keats construct speakers who deserve mourning and remembering—who their readers should mourn—in their respective poems "Remember" and "This Living Hand." Rossetti's speaker urges the listener to "Remember me when I am gone," arguing (at least in the sonnet's opening octet) that she is worth remembering and that listener should remember and mourn her (line 1). Rossetti thus positions her reader as someone capable of mourning, indeed someone valuable specifically as a mourner. Similarly, Keats's speaker argues that he is worth mourning by threatening to haunt the listener after he dies until she sacrifices her own life so that her "conscience" might be "calmed" (line 7). In the most austere of possible readings, the listener is thus constructed as someone not worth mourning—someone valuable only insofar as she mourns and remembers the speaker.

These elegiac constructions of personhood seem especially influential in shaping communal and national subjectivity when we consider how poetry functions in contemporary modes of mourning. Dinitia Smith from *The New York Times* emphasizes the significant role that poetry played in Americans' responses to 9/11, describing numerous poems and verses accompanying photos of victims at Ground Zero, in makeshift memorials around New York City, and even in emails among friends and family. Doss observes a similar prevalence of poems and verses left at the spontaneous memorials that sprang up around Columbine High School in the hours and weeks following the shooting (299-300). Books about consoling poetry like *Wider than the Sky: Essays and Meditations on the Healing Power of Emily Dickinson* and *The Healing*

Spirit of Haiku further affirm poetry as a valuable resource for mourners at all stages of the grieving process. Because poetry seems to play a significant role in contemporary responses to loss—and because responses to loss help determine who is and is not valued as a person and a community member—we must situate poetry within the body of rhetorics of mourning, focusing on the connections between poetry and rhetoric. By re-orienting both rhetoric and poetry around their shared origins in mourning, we may recognize more diverse ways of mourning—and ways of consoling others and ourselves, and thereby approach more inclusive concepts of personhood and more inclusive communities.

Rhetoric itself may be characterized as a way of seeing that attends to loss. For example, according to Kenneth Burke, rhetorical identification arises from the loss or absence of connection between people, even just in our physical separation from one another. Rhetoric views the absence or loss of connection as the impetus for dialogue. Poetry similarly aims for dialogue in that, as M. Jimmie Killingsworth explains, it appeals to—pleases and pleads with—audiences as much as rhetoric does. From a rhetorical viewpoint, we may recognize not only that loss constitutes a prominent theme in both poetry and philosophy, but also that loss structures the very form of both poetic and philosophical conversations. Various poetic forms like metaphor, rhythm, the sonnet, and the villanelle all turn on formal relations structured by loss and/or absence. Similarly, the dialogic aims of philosophical discourse—a discourse motivated by a love for ever-elusive wisdom—may likewise be viewed in terms of absence and loss. But what counts as loss and as dialogue in these respective contexts? If rhetoric, poetry, and

philosophy all recognize loss as an exigence for dialogue, then do our professional practices of reading, writing, and teaching perform modes of mourning?

This dissertation treats loss and dialogue not only as themes of lyric poetry and philosophical treatises, but also as heuristic lenses of rhetorical analysis. I aim first to account for ethical and ontological implications of personal losses expressed in lyric poetry, and second to relate these implications to our professional reading, writing, and teaching. Such considerations of loss promise to illuminate ethical values of dialogue itself. I want to account for how we come to terms with loss, how we speak of losing loved ones, and how we conceive of our own singular deaths. What kinds of personal and communal terms constitute our conversations about and reflections on death, loss, and absence?

Artistic and Constitutive Approaches to Rhetoric

Because scholarly conversations about loss, absence, and death engage literary scholars and philosophers alike, two complementary approaches shape the scholarly conversation about rhetoric and loss: artistic rhetoric and constitutive rhetoric. Artistic rhetoricians emphasize specific tropes and/or styles in literary works. By clarifying how certain authors craft specific effects and evoke responses from their respective readers, artistic rhetoricians helpfully affirm the presence of persuasion in the artistic realm. Constitutive rhetoricians, on the other hand, emphasize how rhetoric shapes and makes available certain acts and kinds of agency. By distinguishing between artistic and constitutive approaches, we may clarify the dialogic relationship between accounts of specific discourses of loss and accounts of broader issues like the nature of melancholy.

Through their dialogic relationship, however, artistic and constitutive rhetorics remain inseparable.

Artistic rhetoricians focus on specific writer-reader connections when analyzing loss in literary works. These scholars emphasize how specific affects (anxiety, melancholy, etc.) mediate writer-reader connections—and how discourses of loss include certain audiences but exclude others. Gail L. Mortimer analyzes the rhetoric of loss in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, clarifying ontological implications of Faulkner's tropes that convey the anxiety of human experience "so essentially" fraught with "loss" (250). In her article "A Story Beside(s) Itself: The Language of Loss in Djuna Barnes *Nightwood*," Victoria L. Smith more recently explains how Barnes's rhetoric challenges the elite status of the "discourse of melancholia" and thereby makes this discourse accessible to "marginalized" members of society excluded from this affect (V. Smith 202). Similarly, in her article "The Rhetoric of Embodied Memory in 'In the City of Slaughter,'" Sara R. Horowitz focuses on how rhetorical tropes in Bialik's poem re-orient the reader in relationship to gender and time, challenging conventional expectations of gender and history. These analyses of artistic rhetoric show how literary writers and readers negotiate relationships with texts and with each other based on persuasion and its attendant effects and emotions. Such artistic rhetorical approaches, however, do not interrogate the nature or limits of rhetoric's agency nor do they address constitutive consequences of rhetoric.

Constitutive rhetoricians emphasize broader issues like the nature of rhetoric and how rhetoric constitutes various kinds of experiences and identities/personhoods. For

example, Andrea Brady and Philippe-Joseph Salazar consider how rhetoric constitutes specific experiences of loss. In her book *English Funerary Elegy in the Seventeenth Century: Laws in Mourning*, Brady "reads funerary elegies as ritualized utterances in order to understand how they are affected by context, time and expectation," thereby illuminating rhetorical contours of poetry and their connections to experiences of mourning rituals (1). From a rhetorical perspective, Brady considers how ritualistic elegies help "mak[e] the obligatory desirable," how elegies help make our obligations to grieve the deaths of loved ones and to come to terms with our own deaths more "desirable" (2). Yet Brady focuses more on the nature of seventeenth-century mourning than on how rhetoric performs such processes of directing desire at the conceptual level and with ontological consequences.

Other constitutive rhetoricians speak to the nature of melancholy and mourning in general. Philippe-Joseph Salazar argues in his article "Rhetoric on the Bleachers, or, the Rhetorician as Melancholic" that Thomas B. Farrell "deplored . . . the absence of norms of rhetorical culture," and that "[t]his deploration is, in essence, melancholic" (358). By using Farrell as a representative of an attitude essential to the contemporary rhetorician's perspective, Salazar demonstrates that the contemporary rhetorician mourns the loss of a critical culture. Salazar's argument hinges on a specific loss, however, while I suggest that the attitude of loss is an essential structure of the rhetorician's perspective. Brady and Salazar portray rhetoric and poetry as reflecting various kinds of mourning processes and thereby constructing certain conceptions of selves and others. These contemporary accounts of melancholy take mourning and melancholia to be attitudes

directed toward specific events or processes (rhetoric in Salazar's case, funerals in Brady's case). This account of melancholia differs, however, from Freud's understanding of melancholia—an attitude that overshadows one's entire outlook.

Peter Sacks offers one of the most prominent accounts of the psychological, Freudian contours of the elegy. Sacks claims that healthy mourning aims for resolution, which may be achieved through reading and/or writing elegies. Tammy Clewell suggests, however, that mourning may be a never-ending process whereby a person continually comes to terms with the losses that define her as much as her achievements. In her essay, "Mourning Beyond Melancholia," mourning seems to be a way of life, even exceeding Freud's sense of melancholic depression. When we view mourning as a never-ending process, we expand possibilities for recognizing continuities between mourning and other emotions, attitudes, and affects including anger, aggression (as Clewell emphasizes), fear, desire, nostalgia, hope, and aesthetic appreciation. For example, "the aesthetic pleasure" afforded by Keats's haunting poem "This Living Hand" is "inseparable from aesthetic pain," as Brooke Hopkins argues from a Freudian view (38). Keats's poem pleases the reader by reminding her of her own death and thereby relieving her repression of and alienation from that inevitable event (B. Hopkins 38). Continuities among diverse emotions, like the one Hopkins's identifies between aesthetic pain and pleasure, become clearer when we account for the ways that myriad emotions respond to loss, which I discuss in Chapter III: The Many Faces of Loss.

Mourning may affect us enduringly by changing the way we experience not just grief, but also hope, joy, and consolation, recasting them as responses, more or less

direct, to loss. Mourning endures not simply as depression or unending grief, but also beyond the grieving process, in the ways that it changes mourners and their communities. Some theorists also take mourning's infinitude to affect the way we interpret aesthetic expressions of grief. For example, Charity Scribner not only agrees with Clewell's sense that mourning lacks "finitude or "any consummation," but Scribner even shows that "real loss" resists aestheticization (317, 321). In light of Jacques Lacan's contributions, mourning appears to be bounded only by "the impossibility of aestheticizing grief" (321). By resisting aesthetic representation, grief seems to lack communicability, thereby possibly undermining dialogue between mourners. Scribner reads grief's lack of finitude, however, as "the potential to sustain the work of collective memory"—where a singular attempt to mourn aesthetically fails, the threshold to affirm "collective memory" and collective modes of mourning arises (317). We may infer that grief's resistance of aesthetic representation thus inspires dialogue. Scribner's account of grief complicates the genre of the elegy, which seems to be situated at an intersection between personal, aesthetic, and public/collective modes of mourning. If the elegy is a work of mourning as Sacks affirms, does this genre aim for an impossible, ever-elusive end? If the elegy thus perpetuates absence, how might such absences motivate dialogues with others and with oneself?

The difficulty of representing grief also seems to have ethical consequences. Infinite mourning processes signify an "irremissible ethical meaning" for R. Clifton Spargo, as he explains in his book *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature* (hereafter cited as *Ethics*). For Spargo, the elegy "figure[es] the

ethical imagination as" motivated by "a mission of impossible protectiveness" of the other (*Ethics* 13). Spargo's "mission of impossible protectiveness" follows from Emmanuel Levinas's ethical theory. In his essay "Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge" (hereafter cited as "Martin Buber"), Levinas characterizes subjectivity as radically responsive to and responsible for the other's singularity. Such responsibility, Levinas explains, "is what is meant by *dialogue*" ("Martin Buber" 67). Spargo suggests that elegiac literature portrays the "ethical imagination" of such a responsible, dialogic subject (13). Spargo thus invites us to view the elegy as inseparable from dialogue. In light of Spargo and Scribner, the elegy seems to aim for two impossible ends—the aestheticization of grief and the protection of the other's singularity. By aiming for these impossible ends, however, the elegy apparently orients itself toward dialogue.

The elegy's aim to protect the other produces what Spargo calls anti-elegiac "tendencies" within the genre (*Ethics* 129). These tendencies resist resolving mourning in a literary work that purports to express and preserve the other—an aim that unethically denies the other's differences (Spargo 67). Jahan Ramazani and Eleanor DesPrez also fear that aesthetic projects may fall short of conveying genuine mourning, and even risk violating the other by attempting to "[redeem] loss as poetic gain" (Ramazani 7). Thus, they favor anti-elegiac works that do not substitute poetic pleasure for genuine grief, but rather engage "incomplete mourning" in their readers—mourning that "ethical[ly] acknowledge[s] . . . the radical alterity of the other whom one mourns" (Spargo, *Ethics* 13). For these critics, consolation, especially aesthetic consolation, may injure the other's difference or elide her altogether in the process of aestheticizing her.

Their critiques of consolation seem potentially dangerous to me, however, because they seem to appreciate the kind of unending grief that characterizes clinical depression and psychological paralysis, as if insisting that grievers should dwell in depression and crippling melancholia forever. In Ch. IV: Elegiac Responsibilities: Consolation in Dialogue, I synthesize our ethical concerns for both the bereaved and for the lost loved ones, suggesting that consolation does not have to erase the other's alterity, which may endure in memories and in other emotions and actions—including consolation. Literary works, especially lyric poems, can evoke ethical consolation in readers by staging speaker-listener dialogues that, in turn, allow the reader to engage dialogically with the work itself. These consoling, dialogic effects arise in part from the dialogic tension between elegiac and anti-elegiac conventions—both of which define "the elegiac genre," according to Spargo (*Ethics 129*).

Levinas's ethics of responsibility affirm dialogic connections between rhetoric, poetry, and philosophy. Jon Kertzer uses Levinas to illuminate existential implications of artistic rhetoric in his article "The Course of a Particular: On the Ethics of Literary Singularity." Adopting a Levinasian perspective similar to Derek Attridge's in *The Singularity of Literature*, Kertzer emphasizes "how aesthetic particularity," especially visible in poetry, "can be troubled into opening an avenue to ethical insight" (232). For Kertzer, ethical inspiration arises "when singularity encounters its own excess" (229). Kertzer emphasizes that poetry offers insights into ethical relations, and thus he points to an intimate connection between constitutive and artistic rhetorics.

Artistic rhetoric, including poetic tropes and structures, evokes particular emotional responses from readers. As constitutive rhetoricians demonstrate, artistic rhetoric may also serve as the very means of self-constitution and of addressing the self's existential situation. We negotiate psychological and ethical considerations of self in the same language and terms in which writers craft poetry. Thus a rhetorical perspective promises to reveal common ground between rhetoric, poetry, and ethics. To address elegiac rhetorics of loss in the short lyric, this dissertation assumes, first, that poetry is actually rhetorical—a view that has been contested in Western thought since the ancient Greek tradition.

Poetry vs. Rhetoric

The claim that poetry is in fact rhetorical arises amidst controversies about the nature of poetry and its relationship to rhetoric and philosophy. Tensions between poetry and rhetoric arose in the work of ancient Western philosophers. Aristotle contrasts poetry and rhetoric based on their respective emphases on imitation and persuasion. In his "Poetics," Aristotle explains, "man is the most mimetic of all" animals and that mimesis, or imitation, "is an instinct of human beings, from childhood" (37). Poetic mimesis or imitation is essential to our humanity, and it is also the defining trait of poetry; Aristotle concludes that "all the poetic arts . . . produce mimesis . . ." ("Poetics" 29). Aristotle defines rhetoric, however, as "an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion" (*On Rhetoric* 37). Persuasion is about the effects or the influence of "speech" on an audience's emotions and "judgment" (Aristotle, *On Rhetoric* 39). Imitation, however, lacks such an emphasis on judgment and decision, as it

produces representations that please and instruct an audience (Aristotle, "Poetics" 37-38). Aristotle describes both poetry and rhetoric as art, which blurs this distinction. Plato dismisses poetry completely from his ideal state in the *Republic* because he considers it deceitful. In the *Gorgias* dialogue, he suggests that both poetry and rhetoric are kinds of flattery, aiming only for pleasure with no concern for what is good or evil. Gorgias's early discussion of rhetoric in his "Encomium of Helen" turns on a skeptical sense of rhetoric. Gorgias demonstrates the power of language and persuasion by asserting that Helen would be innocent if she had been persuaded to go to Troy. Because Plato shares Gorgias's understanding of persuasion, he divorces rhetoric from philosophical dialogue nobly aimed at truth, according to Swearingen in *Rhetoric and Irony: Western Literacy and Western Lies*. Thus both rhetoric and poetry were relegated to the margins of philosophy.

Lloyd F. Bitzer maintains the distinction between rhetoric and poetry in his article "The Rhetorical Situation." Bitzer identifies rhetoric with persuasion, explaining that "rhetoric is a mode of altering reality" and therefore rhetoric situates its audiences as "mediator[s] of change" (4). Rhetoric is "pragmatic" and resides only in the realm of reality (Bitzer 3, 11). Bitzer explains that "a work is rhetorical because it is a response to a situation of a certain kind"—a real situation that differs from the fictional situation of poetry (3). Poetry or literary "fantasy" involves "a mind at play" and does not "requir[e] an audience in order to produce its end" (Bitzer 11, 8). The "poetic audience" simply "consists . . . of persons capable of participating in aesthetic experiences induced by the

poetry" (Bitzer 8). For Bitzer, rhetoric and poetry reside in mutually exclusive realms of reality and fiction, and therefore address mutually exclusive audiences.

Wayne C. Booth argues against dichotomies between reality and fiction, and between rhetoric and fiction in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Booth's emphasis on the author-reader relationship recognizes that even fictional works are written by and for real people in real situations. Booth claims that "the rhetorical dimension in literature is inescapable" because "the very concept of writing a story" or any fictional work "seems to have implicit within it the notion of finding techniques of expression that will make the work accessible in the highest possible degree" (105). Fiction implies that its subject is capable of being communicated to a real audience. For Booth, rhetoric includes any "effort to help the reader grasp the work" (xiii). By focusing on the real context/situation of literature, Booth recognizes that fiction depends upon reality and rhetoric.

Rhetoric shapes the meaning of reality, explains Richard E. Vatz as he critiques Bitzer in "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation." Vatz suggests that all "situations are rhetorical," and they "obtain their character from the rhetoric which surrounds them or creates them" (159). For Vatz, rhetoric creates the meaning of situations, whereas for Bitzer, rhetoric is dictated by "an intrinsic nature in events" themselves (Vatz 155). Vatz recognizes that, because "language is always value-laden," situations' meanings depend on "the rhetor's arbitrary choice of characterization" (Vatz 157). Kenneth Burke explains a similar view in his theory of "terministic screens." In his essay "Language as Action: Terministic Screens," Burke defines terministic screens as a set of terms and their attendant values, attitudes, and motives that determine what is and is not a possible

experience of reality. Terministic screens determine what counts as a situation, and thus they help us create the meanings of our experiences. While we can compare and contrast various terministic screens (like religion, politics, Christianity, heteronormativity, etc.) to glimpse different aspects of a given situation, no single terministic screen can reveal all aspects of any situation. Every screen selects and deflects certain aspects of reality, thereby attributing a certain meaning and not another to a situation. As Vatz points out, rhetoric involves recognizing the choices that these processes imply, the choices that create a situation's meaning. Rhetoric thus does not seem to be merely a function of one type of situation, as Bitzer would have it, but rather a way of responding to any situation that recognizes how stylistic choices constitute experiences.

Poetry seems to be one such choice—a rhetorical choice—of describing a situation or experience. In poems like Gerard Manley Hopkins's "Spring and Fall" and Richard Wilbur's "Boy at the Window," the poets seem to crystallize moments of grief in attempts to understand and to illuminate some of the ambiguities of this emotional experience. Poetry draws attention to its language as one choice of many possible choices of how to describe an experience of an emotion or idea. For example, when Richard Wilbur describes the complex context surrounding the boy's weeping for the snowman, Wilbur seems to resist expectations of grief as a cold, dark, even isolating emotion. Through the snowman's gaze, we see the weeping boy "surrounded by/Such warmth, such light, such love, and so much fear" (Wilbur lines 15-16). Gwendolyn Brooks similarly seems to complicate assumptions that "hell" is a place in her poem "my dreams, my works, must wait till after hell." In Brooks's poem, the speaker seems to

emphasize hell-like experiences of being "very hungry" and "incomplete," experiences that endure during "the devil days of . . . hurt" (Brooks lines 5, 8). Such descriptions suggest that emotional and psychological pain can also be a kind of hell. Keats also resists readers' expectations of elegiac mourning in "This Living Hand." Keats's speaker mourns for his own eventual death rather than for the loss of a loved one, threatening to haunt the reader until she is compelled to sacrifice her own life so that her "conscience" might be "calmed" (7). Keats's curse flies in the face of the conventional elegiac aim to protect the other, conveying a threat that opposes readers' expectations of elegiac care. By resisting readers' assumptions about grief and hell, Wilbur, Brooks, and Keats emphasize that their poetic descriptions constitute rhetorical choices about how to describe emotional experiences and situations.

Reading, Writing, Responsibility

Readers' awareness of such rhetorical choices plays an important role in J. Hillis Miller's theory of ethical reading. In his essay "The Ethics of Reading," Miller explains that ethical reading involves "respon[ding] to what the words on the page say rather than to what we wish they said or came to the book expecting them to say" (190). Our expectations of texts, like terministic screens, shape texts' meanings. For example, Brooks's poem would mean something different if we assumed that hell could only be a specific place. Miller urges us "to recognize the unexpected" that a text presents, the way a text resists and revises our expectations—even though such reading is "unfortunately not all that common" (189-190). Like Miller, Drucilla Cornell fears that without resisting cultural assumptions, reading and writing can promote oppressive cultural norms. In her

essay "Feminine Writing, Metaphor, and Myth," Cornell recognizes that the oppression of minorities and of women is validated by enduring cultural myths. To end such oppression, we must revise, re-write, and re-imagine these cultural myths, according to Cornell. In other words, we must change the terministic screens that de-value or exclude some people's experiences from the category of human experience. Poetry may promote such ethical revisions both by emphasizing the rhetorical choices that produce terministic screens and by imagining new terministic screens that may attribute more inclusive, more humane values to situations and experiences. Rhetoric may likewise promote such ethical revisions by functioning as a terministic screen through which we can contrast and evaluate various other terministic screens. Such revisions of terministic screens also depend on written and oral dialogue among poets and readers, speakers and audiences.

My use of dialogue and loss as heuristic lenses depends on dual definitions of these terms. Dialogue primarily means reciprocal, responsive interactions between people—what Wayne Brockriede describes as bilateral, "fully human interaction" (10). Such dialogue is deeply personal since each interlocutor must "risk his very self in his attempt to establish a bilateral relationship" with the audience (Brockriede 5). Dialogue is thus deeply ethical. "Responsibility," Emmanuel Levinas explains, "is what is meant by *dialogue*," and such dialogue entails "a commitment in which the other remains in his otherness" ("Martin Buber" 67). Dialogue is the crux of Levinas's ontological ethics, which form the cornerstone of Judith Butler's ethics of responsibility in "Giving an Account of Oneself." Dialogue or rhetorical reciprocity, as Butler explains, makes

possible ethical recognitions of selves and others. Our humanity, the very possibility of "a human face," depends on such reciprocity (Butler 23). I conclude that ethical rhetoric must be dialogic.

My dialogic heuristic coincides with C. Jan Swearingen's constitutive rhetorical view in *Rhetoric and Irony: Western Literacy and Western Lies*. Swearingen describes Plato's emphasis on dialogue as the appropriate medium for philosophical discovery. Monologue is a dangerous mode of expression for Plato, who feels that "deceptiveness is an inherent and sometimes deliberate function of monologue" (Swearingen, *Rhetoric* 74). Dialogue, on the other hand, avoids such deceptiveness because in the situation of "viva voce" dialogue, the speaker is available and accountable to the audience (Swearingen, *Rhetoric* 74). Only through such mutually correcting reciprocity can philosophical interlocutors approach valid knowledge. Ethical rhetoric constitutes the kind of dialogic reciprocity that makes such philosophical pursuits possible.

For Levinas, such responsible dialogue is ontological. Because subjectivity is ontologically responsive to and responsible for the other in Levinas's theory, such responsiveness constitutes responsible, ontological dialogue. I would suggest that such responsible dialogue is the aim of ethical rhetoric, and such an aim resonates on an ontological level. Applying Levinas's theory to rhetoric in this way also leads us to view Levinas as, in part, a rhetorical theorist. Such a view would, for example, prompt us to revise R. Clifton Spargo's characterization of Levinas's rhetoric. In *Vigilant Memory: Emmanuel Levinas, the Holocaust, and the Unjust Death* (hereafter cited as *Vigilant Memory*), Spargo recognizes that "mourning . . . functions throughout Levinas's canon as

an internal rhetoric of his discourse as well as a sign of rhetorical imperatives denoting and inflecting his descriptions of ethics" (32).[2] Here Spargo helpfully demonstrates that Levinas's ethical discourse, like all discourse, has its own rhetoric. I suggest, however, that because Levinas's rhetoric emphasizes dialogue and responsibility, Levinas's rhetoric conveys a meta-argument that such dialogic ethics is itself inherently rhetorical. In Levinas's rhetorical style, Spargo sees the mournful dimensions that affirm loss as a central component of dialogue and rhetoric. The mournful dimensions of Levinas's ethics thus also resonate with elegiac poetry, which itself responds to and protects the singularities of selves and others, as Jon Kertzer and Derek Attridge explain. Levinas

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2. Jon Kertzer recognizes a convergence of the rhetoric of singularity expressed in literature and poetry, such as Wallace Stevens's poems, and Levinas's ethics. Kertzer claims, "Ethics and aesthetics . . . exhibit the same structure" in that "a specific obligation or artistic response is not subsumed within general rules or aesthetic forms" but rather "the particular" in both ethical and aesthetic contexts "stubbornly resists the generality to which it contributes" (Kertzer 228). For example, Kertzer characterizes Dylan Thomas's poem "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London" as a World War II elegy that "refuses" to mourn a child killed in the Blitz, concluding that Thomas thereby "portrays most poignantly what must be true of all people at any moment: all are unique, mortal, and therefore irreplaceable" (220-221). Kertzer argues that "aesthetic particularity can be troubled into opening an avenue to ethical insight," affirming literature's ethical implications (232). Derek Attridge similarly links the literature's singularity with Levinas's ethics: Attridge argues, "The *singularity* of the artwork is not simply a matter of difference from other works . . . but a transformative difference . . . that involves the irruption of *otherness* or *alterity* into the cultural field" (136). The text's singularity is manifest in the reader's experience: "Singularity exists, or rather *occurs*, in the experience of the reader" (Attridge 67). Although Attridge acknowledges that "[t]here is no necessary correlation between being a good reader . . . and being a good person," he claims that "some of the values are at work in both spheres" (130). When, as Attridge claims, "responsibility for the other is . . . a situation in which I find myself in," such situations include encounters with literature, which "constitut[e] me as a literary reader," and encounters with other people, who similarly demand my responsible response (126). Both Attridge and Kertzer affirm that literature, including elegiac poetry, has ethical effects on readers in a Levinasian sense.

thus helps us see an intersection between ethics, rhetoric, and poetry that turns on dialogue and loss.

Loss seems to be an event of contrast in which we encounter a tension between absence and presence. Absence becomes loss when viewed in terms of a previous, valued presence (even if that presence was only an un-actualized possibility). Lyric poetry's representations of loss allow us to explore how both presences and absences shape the meanings of our experiences. As Burke explains, the meanings of experiences seem to depend on our selection and deflection of situational factors. These contrasting processes suggest that dialogic contrast may define the limit of what is possible for us to experience. Swearingen suggests that "binarist contours" may define the nature of Western thought: "Dialectical reasoning continues to manifest itself in the binarist contours of Western thought about thought" (*Rhetoric* 258). Westerners may not be able to conceive of thought or experience in non-binary terms. By reading lyric poetry dialogically, we might bring such limits into better view. Such dialogic methodology seems to coincide with Plato's expectations of "true rhetoric" (Swearingen, *Rhetoric* 71). Such an emphasis on contrast between ideas and situational factors suggests that dialogic contrast may not only exist between two persons. In this sense, I define dialogue as an event of contrast that juxtaposes two entities in terms of their similarities and differences. Dialogue constitutes a tension between presences and absences, a tension constituted in part by the loss/absence of identity.

I apply this dialogue heuristic not only to personal interactions (like those between authors and readers), but also to formal relationships. For example, I suggest

that poetry and philosophy participate in a dialogic, reciprocal relationship with each other. Although poetry and philosophy differ greatly in their writing styles and means of understanding human experiences and language, both disciplines seem to be motivated in part by loss and absence. Philosophy pursues the limits of wisdom, relentlessly interrogating the absence of complete knowledge. Philosophical dialogue itself presupposes that no one individual is endowed with complete knowledge. Elegiac poetry is by definition inspired by loss, but other kinds of poetry also reach out to readers, attempting to turn the absence of connection with an audience into a present relationship. Elegy and philosophical dialogue thus seem to share a dialogic contrast, especially in their respective comments about loss and mourning. This dissertation addresses poetic-philosophical dialogues about loss.

Cultural Contexts of Elegiac Loss

This dissertation addresses elegiac lyrics, although many of the poems analyzed here are not conventional elegies. This project expands the concept of the elegy by considering how lyrics about various kinds of losses and grief may rhetorically evoke elegiac responses in readers. This criteria for elegies is not found in Peter Sacks's list of basic elegiac conventions, which focuses on the content and structure of poems and includes:

> the use of pastoral contextualization, the myth of the vegetation deity . . . the use of repetition and refrains, the reiterated questions, the outbreak of vengeful anger or cursing, the procession of mourners, the movement from grief to consolation . . . the traditional images of resurrection . . . the

> eclogic division with or between mourning voices, the question of contests, rewards, and inheritance, and the unusual degree of self-consciousness regarding the actual performance of the work at hand . . . [and] the elegist's need to draw attention, consolingly, to his own surviving powers. (2)

Sacks's definition of the elegy as "a *work*, both in the commonly accepted meaning of a product and in the more dynamic sense of the working through of an impulse or experience" emphasizes the elegist's motives for writing, and he uses a Freudian approach to delineate the consoling effects that writing poetry has on the elegist (2). What meaning, however, does such poetry, centered on the self, have for readers as the poet's audience? By reading poems rhetorically and tracing how elegies aim to evoke specific emotions in readers, this dissertation emphasizes the dialogic, relational aspects of the elegy. Such other-oriented elements allow elegies to inspire dialogic relationships between writers and readers, and among readers of various times and places. The ability to inspire dialogue may be the elegy's most healing feature for both writers and readers, which is why it is important to consider how even possibly narcissistic, sentimental elegiac conventions appeal to others—for example, by inviting readers to sympathize and identify with grieving speakers and characters. Such consideration entails attending to the many dialogic contexts of loss.

In order to gain perspective on the elegy's dialogic contexts, this dissertation analyzes a small collection of brief lyrics that represent anthology pieces more or less indicative of the literary canon. Some poems like Gerard Manley Hopkins's "Spring and

Fall" and Emily Dickinson's "After great pain, a formal feeling comes" (hereafter cited as "After") appear in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, a general anthology of English poetry. On the other hand, Robert Frost's "Desert Places" comes from the *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*, which focuses on English poetry written in a specific time and place. Richard Wilbur's poem "Boy at the Window" does not actually appear in an anthology of which I am aware, but as a short lyric that shares structural and thematic similarities with anthologized poems, it is the kind of poem by a nationally-acclaimed author that tends to get anthologized. By applying the category of anthology poetry in this broad way, this dissertation aims to consider how the appeals of loss function within the literary canon.

These pieces not only represent appeals of loss and grief directed to the specific audiences of their poets; they also represent appeals that have been affirmed and endorsed by the literary community. By endorsing certain poems in anthologies, the literary community prioritizes these poems as the kinds of works that students should be introduced to, and thus these poems take hold in our cultural memory. For example, many American high school and college students—whether English majors or not—may be familiar with some of Robert Frost's poems like "Nothing Gold Can Stay" from introductory writing and literature courses. For students who do not pursue careers related to literature, these selections may remain some of the poems they know most thoroughly and remember most readily. In addition, anthologies and the works they include tend to be more easily available to readers, even those who may not be familiar with a poet's collected works. Finally, because poems that have been anthologized

repeatedly—such as Shakespeare's sonnets—are recognized by so many audiences, entertainment media like films and new fiction may allude to these works as a kind of cultural appeal. These works are part of the citational pool that constitutes a cultural consciousness. For example, even middle school readers may learn about Frost's "Nothing Gold Can Stay" from S. E. Hinton's repeated allusions to it in *The Outsiders*.

Such poems, anthologized and perhaps holding an even greater cultural presence, may become part of our cultural memory as multiple generations learn about them. In this respect, they may even function like Burkeian "terministic screens" insofar as these poems provide terms for negotiating experiences of loss. For example, in *Wider than the Sky: Essays and Meditations on the Healing Power of Emily Dickinson*, diverse Dickinson readers express how consoling her poems were to them when they faced various kinds of loss and trauma. Mell McDonnell narrates her struggle to survive the United Airlines Flight 232 crash, integrating fragments from Dickinson's lyric "'Hope' is the thing with feathers" throughout her chaotic thoughts (65). When faced with death, the "Emily Dickinson poem [rose] to the surface" of McDonnell's memory, preserving the possibility of hope in a traumatic experience (65). McDonnell affirms that short, memorable lyrics function as terministic screens, especially for individuals in situations of loss. Such poems may serve similar functions on the cultural level, as affirmed by the collection of essays itself, when these poems are anthologized for a broad readership.

By attending to the elegiac valences of various anthologized lyrics, we may observe appeals to loss as a repetitive trend throughout anthology selections. Why do such elegiac appeals seem so prevalent in the anthology genre? Why do some elegiac

lyrics seem to have such enduring appeal? In anthology selections, appeals to loss become a common literary ground providing communal contexts for dialogue among scholars, students, and members of the public. Is such a communal, dialogic effect uniquely elegiac in some way? Such questions require us to consider not only the audiences to which these poems appeal, but also what audiences they may exclude. By prioritizing certain poets and audiences—and thus possibly perpetuating certain cultural, ethnic, or gendered biases—do anthologies themselves perpetuate or invoke particular kinds of cultural and/or aesthetic losses?

My focus on elegiac appeals in anthology poems addresses a narrower scope than, for example, Spargo develops in *The Ethics of Mourning* by tracing themes of loss across all literary genres. Because short, anthology poems emphasize mnemonic devices like alliteration, rhyme, and rhythm patterns—almost asking to be remembered after initial readings—their form seems to be an important element in their enduring cultural presences. Analyzing these poems' enduring appeals may show us something about how our culture continues to negotiate grief. In *Poets Thinking: Pope, Whitman, Dickinson, Yeats*, Helen Vendler suggests that the patterns of poetic forms, including seriality and images, that characterize the oeuvres of poets like Emily Dickinson and W. B. Yeats structure the patterns of these poets' very thoughts. Rejecting the assumption that thought resides only in rational, scientific, and forensic realms, Helen Vendler shows how thought is also emotional. My methodology echoes Vendler's interpretive approach, as I identify enduring philosophical implications of emotional responses to loss. I think poetic forms may express not only emotions, but also our philosophies about loss and

dialogue. By emphasizing loss and dialogue as experiences of contrast, I address not only the values of loss and of poetry itself, but also the value of what we as literary critics do. When we attend to the dialogic relationship between poetry and philosophy, we may address the ethics of our profession and may approach more inclusive, more humane ways of practicing literary scholarship.

Elegiac Rhetorics

In examining loss and dialogue in lyric poetry, I expand the concept of the elegy by considering how lyrics about various kinds of losses and grief may rhetorically evoke elegiac responses in readers. This emphasis on the readers of elegies challenges writer-centered definitions of the elegy, like that given by Peter Sacks, who describes how the elegy's formal conventions express the elegist's own motives for writing. Although Sacks's Freudian approach helpfully delineates some of the consoling effects that writing poetry has on the elegist herself, this dissertation revises such writer-centered concepts of the elegy by asking how elegies rhetorically invoke ethical relationships between writers and readers. By reading elegiac poems through Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theories and Emmanuel Levinas's ethics, I argue that these poems express that, as Levinas suggests, subjectivity is fundamentally structured by ethical relationships with others. This argument also revises Levinas's claims, however, by demonstrating the rhetorical and elegiac dimensions of his definition of ethical subjectivity. My rhetorical approach demonstrates how lyrics about loss engage, via deeply personal perspectives, the same kind of elegiac subjectivity that Levinas describes in sweeping philosophical strokes.

Loss structures the boundary between the presence and absence of subjectivity in that, as I argue in Chapter II: "Death: What Loss Implies," loss of all kinds reminds us of and brings us into relation with our own deaths. For Levinas, all suffering, including loss, confronts us with our own inevitable deaths. Death terrifies us not because it signifies temporal finitude, but because it signifies the absence of our ability "*to be able*"—our ability to create relationships, including connections with other people and with ourselves, as Levinas explains in "Time and the Other" (hereafter cited as "Time") (42). In Gerard Manley Hopkins's "Spring and Fall," Margaret's mourning for Goldengrove implies a narcissistic concern with her own mortality; Hopkins suggests that all grieving is at least in part a grieving for oneself. Such apparently narcissistic grief, however, may still mourn for our own deaths as a loss of connection with others. In this Levinasian sense, my own death is itself a kind of loss of the other. To the extent that I am only an ethical subject insofar as I am responsible for the other, subjectivity is a life that is always already a "dying for" the other—the act that, as Levinas suggests, performs meaning through the death that undermines it ("Dying For" 215).

Robert Frost similarly recognizes that all presence implies its own death/absence in "Nothing Gold Can Stay," suggesting that attitudes of loss—like those that Levinas locates at the heart of subjectivity itself—attend to presence as implicit absence. The appeal of absence affects the way we experience presences; as Frost argues, all "Gold" or precious things, including life itself, do not "stay" or endure eternally. If, as Tammy Clewell suggests, the self's very presence is constituted as much by her "losses" as by her achievements, then we may be invited to ask how we make ourselves present to—

and connected with—others and ourselves through our responses to absence (Clewell 60).

Death haunts human presence in that, as I argue in Chapter III: "The Many Faces of Loss," loss motivates a wide range of emotions and attitudes such that our own deaths shadow experiences of melancholy, desire, aggression, and, perhaps above all, fear. For example, in Richard Wilbur's poem "Boy at the Window," the boy "weeps" for the loss of connection and comfort he projects onto the snowman "standing all alone" amidst a "night of gnashing and enormous moan" (lines 1, 4). The personified snowman responds empathetically by "melt[ing] enough to drop . . . a tear/For the child at the bright pane surrounded by/Such warmth, such light, such love, and so much fear" (Wilbur 13-16). The snowman and the reader mourn the boy's grief so that sadness becomes a common ground of connection between the poem and its reader. The repetition in Wilbur's closing line emphasizes continuity among the affective elements of "warmth," "light," "love," and "fear" (16). Such continuity among apparently diverse emotions invites readers to attend to the interconnections among love, fear, and loss. I suggest that loss and its implications of death may underlie both the overwhelming presence and utter absence of emotions by comparing Dickinson's "After great pain" with Frost's "Desert Places" and Wilbur's "Boy at the Window." Loss's pervasive presence in poems about emotional experiences suggests that poetry itself expresses the ethical agency that is, for Levinas, our means of overcoming death's absence of meaning.

In Chapter IV: "Elegiac Responsibilities: Consolation in Dialogue," I address the debate about the ethics of consolation. While consolation, for Sacks, is the healthy end

for which mourning aims, scholars like Tammy Clewell, Jahan Ramazani, and Eleanor DesPrez fear that such terminal mourning endangers the other, even after her death. Such "compensatory" mourning, perpetuated in literature whereby the mourner establishes a substitute for the lost other, uses the other's death as aesthetic capital (Ramazani 3). In *The Ethics of Mourning*, Spargo identifies an anti-elegiac "strain" within the elegiac tradition that resists the risks presented by conventional elegies and "foresees no end to mourning" (13). I argue, however, that anti-elegiac conventions may contribute to the elegy's dialogic effects—effects which evoke an ethical kind of consolation that is not antithetical to grief. Such consolation seems especially valuable to mourners like the writers in *Wider than the Sky* and even Americans after 9/11, who were "consoling themselves—and one another—with poetry in an almost unprecedented way," according to Dinitia Smith of *The New York Times*. In this chapter, I analyze three poems—John Donne's "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning," John Keats's "This Living Hand," and Christina Rossetti's "Remember"—that, through both elegiac and anti-elegiac means, appeal to readers' value of dialogic connections with others. These poems' anti-elegiac conventions stage speaker-listener dialogues that, in turn, allow the reader to engage dialogically with the poem itself. These poems allow for contrasting emotions to coexist, offering readers a sense of consolation even in the midst of mourning.

My conclusion, "Elegiac Response," considers how we could practice an ethics of empathy based on Levinas's ethical responsibility. How do the ways we read, select/edit, and teach anthology poems affect our relationships with other scholars, with our students, and with the public at large? Such questions turn on a willingness to

synthesize—to sympathize with—both poetic and philosophical viewpoints. Elegiac lyrics rhetorically put their readers in a position to account for the mournfulness of our responsibilities on which ethical, dialogic subjectivity seems to depend.

CHAPTER II

DEATH: WHAT LOSS IMPLIES

Personhood and Loss

In her article "Spontaneous Memorials and Contemporary Modes of Mourning in America," Erika Doss argues that communal expressions of mourning, including public memorials, determine who does—and does not—count as a person whose death is worth grieving, and, by implication, whose life was valuable (295). For example, in the aftermath of the shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, in which two high school students killed twelve of their peers and a teacher and wounded twenty-three more, local residents mourned by creating various memorials for the lost lives (Doss 296). Greg Zanis, a carpenter from Illinois, was so moved by the tragedy that he erected fifteen wooden crosses—one for each of the thirteen victims and the two suicidal perpetrators who died—on a hill near Columbine High School (Doss 311). Despite Zanis's motive to "'help heal people,'" his crosses evoked a violent public dispute between people mourning the thirteen victims and those mourning the perpetrators (Lowe qtd. in Doss 311; Doss 311). After two days, the two crosses commemorating the perpetrators were discarded by Brian Rohrbough, the father of one of the murdered students (Doss 311). While Zanis viewed the killers as "'victims of society'" worthy of commemoration like the people they killed, Rohrbough and other mourners characterized the killers as "undeserving of any form of commemoration or consideration"—as if through their brutal actions the shooters had divested themselves

of personhood worthy of mourning (Gray qtd. in Doss 311; Doss 311-312). Who or what counts as lost personhood or subjectivity deserving of grief is constructed and in part projected onto individuals by their companions and communities, Doss demonstrates.

Personhood is projected and constructed in part through mourning and grief; as Doss concludes: "Grief is thus a form of claiming" and "an insistence on belonging, too" as mourners claim lost loved ones as family, friends, and above all, human beings (315). By identifying lost loved ones as persons belonging to familial, political, and other kinds of communities, mourners affirm who does—and does not—belong to these communities. In doing so, mourners also identify themselves as members of those same communities, including the community of humanity. Although Doss does not address ways in which mourners construct and project personhood onto themselves through their expressions of grief, Emmanuel Levinas does. Personhood, for Levinas, is constructed through one's actualization of one's capacity for responsibility through mournful, ethical attitudes and actions. Levinas's theory of ethical subjectivity complements Doss's emphasis on how we project personhood onto others—Levinas and Doss describe different sides of a two-fold process through which personhood is constructed and projected. Not only do we project personhood onto others, but also the ways in which we do so reflexively construct our own personhood. Both ways of constructing personhood are tied to mourning and loss in Doss's and Levinas's accounts of subjectivity. Levinas seems to explain how and why we project personhood onto others in his theory of responsibility. Levinas's account of ethical, responsible subjectivity is discernible in elegiac poems like Gerard Manley Hopkins's "Spring and Fall: *To a Young Child*" and

Robert Frost's "Nothing Gold Can Stay." When we read these poems in light of Levinas's theory, they seem to demonstrate how responsible personhood may be rhetorically projected onto selves and others through lyric poetry.

Rhetorics and Ethics of Loss

In order to be a human subject, according to Levinas in "Ethics as First Philosophy" (hereafter cited as "Ethics), "[o]ne has to speak, to say *I*, to be in the first person, precisely to be me" (82). This saying "I" implies the presence of an audience, an other who "calls for me," which suggests that subjectivity or personhood is inherently responsive, is achieved through one's response to the other who precedes her ("Ethics" 83). The subject not only responds to the other, Levinas explains, but is also ethically responsible to and for the other, who the self's presence may lethally displace ("Ethics" 83). This lethal threat posed by the self, prior to her consciousness or intention of posing such a threat, makes the self responsible for the other, who "calls" the self's presence "into question" and requires her to justify her presence, as if the self "had to answer for the other's death even before *being*" (Levinas, "Ethics" 83). Responsibility for the other conditions subjectivity, and in doing so, grounds subjectivity in loss.

The subject is one who fears the loss of the other, on whom her own subjectivity depends; the subject "fear[s] injustice more than death," fears harming the other more than her own death (Levinas, "Ethics" 85). One's own death is certainly a defining mark of subjectivity in Levinas's account since he observes that the fear of one's own death underlies "[a]ll affectivity" and emotion, which "is always emotion for something moving you, but also emotion for oneself" ("Ethics" 84). Overcoming one's fear for one's

own death in acting responsibly toward the other is the human subject's ethical attitude. The "human" as Levinas explains in "Dying For . . ." is one "in which worry over the death of the other comes before care for self" (216). This ethical worry about the other implies a loss of the self; responsibility is primary and inescapable for the human subject, who "is a hostage" in her responsibility for the other, which is "the trauma of persecution" (Levinas, "Substitution" 101). Human subjectivity, for Levinas, thus emerges in one's willingness to lose or sacrifice oneself in order to prevent the loss of the other. Subjectivity's response to and responsibility for loss lends it a mournful, elegiac quality to Levinas's account. As R. Clifton Spargo observes, "mourning . . . functions throughout Levinas's canon as an internal rhetoric of his discourse as well as a sign of rhetorical imperatives denoting and inflecting his descriptions of ethics" (*Vigilant Memory* 32). Levinas portrays subjectivity itself as mournful and elegiac due to its origins in loss and responsibility, and, as Spargo suggests, this elegiac quality is tied to the "rhetorical imperatives" that also seem to condition responsible subjectivity (*Vigilant Memory* 32).

The self's initial address to the other in saying "I," an address that functions as a response to the other, who "calls for" the self, occurs in a rhetorical situation—a situation in which a speaker addresses an audience and persuades that audience to recognize her as the person she is, as a person (Levinas, "Ethics" 83). To recognize someone (either another or oneself) as a person, especially in light of Doss's example of how fine the line may be between who is and is not recognized as a person, and of the intense emotional stakes of such distinctions, seems like an action that alters reality in

the way that Lloyd F. Bitzer argues all rhetorical discourse does (3-4). In this sense that saying "I" invokes one's responsibility for the other and one's subjectivity, this address is "value-laden" and "evocative," which aligns with Richard E. Vatz's critique and expansion of Bitzer's rhetorical situation (157). Indeed, Vatz's account of the rhetor's "responsibility for the salience he has *created*" seems to coincide with Levinas's account of how the subject's saying "I" conveys her responsibility to and for the other (Vatz 158). The subject's response creates salience and felt presence, as Vatz explains in citing Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca: "It is not enough indeed that a thing should exist for a person to feel its presence;" rather the speaker's selection of and attention to certain elements in her speech "endows these elements with a *presence*" that can be felt by the audience (Vatz 157; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 117, 116). Speaking and expressing oneself in other ways—including gestures of mourning—creates presences, including, as Doss affirms, the presence of personhood. Responses to loss—and the ways in which they make personhood present—thus seem to function rhetorically, especially in the ways in which they "*cause* . . . meaning" by creating personhood (Vatz 160).

Rhetoric itself seems to be a way of responding and attending to loss, in light of Kenneth Burke's definition of rhetorical identification. The loss of connection, or separation, between people is the exigence for rhetoric, suggests Kenneth Burke in *A Rhetoric of Motives* (hereafter *RM*): "[I]f men were not apart from one another," in a physical sense, "there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity" (*RM* 22). Such division inherent in our discrete physical bodies and in our various ideologies, attitudes, values, etc. may be overcome via identification. We may identify two people

who share "common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them *consubstantial*" (*RM* 21). Two individuals are "'substantially one'" when "their interests are joined" even though each person simultaneously "remains unique, an individual locus of motives" such that each person is simultaneously "joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial" with another person (*RM* 21). Although rhetorical identification does not erase differences, it "is compensatory to division" and solves the problem of separation by unifying individuals (*RM* 22). For example, in Doss's example of the Columbine shooting, the carpenter, Zanis, identified the victims with their killers since they all had died; he even went so far as to identify them in terms of their shared victim-hood when he called the killers "victims of society," rhetorically unifying the victims and their killers posthumously via his words and his memorial crosses (Gray qtd. in Doss 311). Insofar as rhetoric aims to identify the audience with the speaker, to persuade the audience to identify with the speaker's message, rhetoric seems to be a way of attending and responding to loss, specifically the loss of connection between people. In this respect, rhetoric seems to retain an elegiac strain.

Poetics of Loss

Like Doss and Levinas, Gerard Manley Hopkins seems to address the constitutive elements of personhood in his short lyric "Spring and Fall: *To a Young Child*." Although Hopkins's poem seems to emphasize, on the explicit level of diction and imagery, that separation and loss of connection from others constitute the "blight[ed]" condition of personhood, the dialogic relationships that he depicts through the rhetorical situations in and beyond the poem demonstrate how loss and separation

may facilitate connections with others (G. Hopkins, "Spring" line 14). Mourning reflects the subject's fundamental orientation toward loss in Hopkins's poem, but emotions like mourning and grief, when we examine them rhetorically, also seem to facilitate identification and connections between characters in the poem, and between Hopkins and his reader. Like Hopkins, Robert Frost also emphasizes the universality of loss in "Nothing Gold Can Stay" (hereafter cited as "Nothing"). Frost's poem complements Hopkins's lyric as both poems use similar symbols of gold, Eden, the season of spring, and of nature in general to describe how processes of becoming are characterized in part by decay, absence, and loss. Frost emphasizes nature more than human subjectivity by referencing natural elements like "flower," "leaf," and "dawn," however, while Hopkins emphasizes human subjectivity through the characters of Margaret and the speaker, and by referencing humanity and human elements through terms like "man," "thoughts," "heart," "sigh," "child," "mouth," and "mind" (Frost, "Nothing" 3, 5, 7; G. Hopkins, "Spring" 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 12). When we read Hopkins's and Frost's poems in light of each other, we may more fully recognize how both poets treat nature as a metaphor that reveals loss at the heart of human subjectivity.

In "North of Boston: Models of Identity, Subjectivity and Place in the Poems of Robert Frost," Stephen Regan argues that Frost expresses "a deep and prolonged interest in the philosophy of mind" and in "the shaping of subjectivity" (par. 2). The shaping of subjectivity includes, for Frost, the "creative interaction" between the human mind and the world, which, Regan suggests, engages the mind's "metaphor-making impulses" and "compulsion to make sense of the world through metaphor" (par. 3-4). Although Regan

teases these conclusions about Frost's philosophical interests out of his more overtly psychological poems like "Tree at My Window," "The Mill City," and "Mowing," we may infer that "Nothing Gold Can Stay" may also express, however indirectly, Frost's interest in the philosophy of mind and subjectivity.

"Nothing Gold Can Stay" may indirectly express the speaker's self-centered view of nature, especially if we read it in light of Roger L. Slakey's focus on "egoism" in Hopkins's "Spring and Fall" (30). Slakey argues, "Margaret is grieving because through Adam's sin she has been turned in on self, and, unawares, she projects on the grove losing its gold leaves the prototypic phenomenon of the loss of Eden. That is, she perceives the falling leaves with an eye informed by self" (28). Margaret projects "unawares" her sense of her own losses onto Goldengrove, perceiving the forest in terms of herself; according to Slakey, Hopkins portrays the source of all sorrow as "the radical self-centeredness of man or self-preoccupation," not just in the sense of a person being egotistical in the moment, but in the sense of a pervasive, universal "egoism" that structures the human mind (28, 30). Egoism may inform the relentless focus on loss in "Nothing Gold Can Stay," a focus which may reflect the poet-speaker's egotistical projection of his or her own sense of loss onto nature.

Such inferences about the speaker's psychological stance toward nature seem to be uninvited, deflected by the poem's style—its universal voice, the lack of characterization of the speaker, the absence of the first-person voice in poems like "Desert Places" that more overtly interrogate psychological projection of one's own attitude onto nature. Such a universal perspective on nature's loss may convey, however,

in light of Slakey's theory of egoism the working of the poet-speaker's mind—the process of projection that enables and undermines such a "universal" view of nature. From this perspective, "Nothing Gold Can Stay" not only speaks to human subjectivity as an incidental part of nature's grand patterns of becoming and decay, but also speaks to human subjectivity as shaping, constituting those patterns as such. This reading also aligns "Nothing Gold Can Stay" with Hopkins's more explicit portrayal of subjectivity as defined and constituted by loss. Both poems address how loss and absence may serve as exigences for presence—especially for the presence of human subjectivity and responsible, dialogic connections between people. These poems themselves seem to be conditioned by loss and may even reflect, however indirectly, each poet's response to encounters with loss. We may clarify how loss informs these poems by briefly considering how loss shapes their biographical and historical contexts.

Loss in Critical and Biographical Contexts

By attending to a few particulars of Hopkins's biography, we find other situations in which Hopkins addresses personhood, mortality, and loss through mournful, metaphorical interpretations of nature. For example, Hopkins's attention to the nature of personhood in "Spring and Fall" reflects his persistent concern with selfhood in his other writings, as a quotation from *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (hereafter cited as *Sermons*) illustrates; Hopkins writes, "I consider my selfbeing, my consciousness and feeling of myself . . . which is . . . incommunicable by any means to another man . . . . . Nothing else in nature comes near this unspeakable stress of pitch, distinctiveness, and selving, this selfbeing of my own" (G. Hopkins,

Sermons 123). This fascination with selfhood also seems to inform "Spring and Fall," with its emphasis on the incommunicability, the utter separation that characterizes selfhood (not only Margaret, but also the speaker and his conclusions about the nature of personhood).

Hopkins's sense of selfhood also seems to be informed by his aesthetic value of nature and his sense of loss. As a child, Hopkins roamed the wilderness of Hampstead Heath near is family's home in Hampstead outside of London (White, "Hopkins: A Life" 59). When Hopkins arrived at Oxford University, he was strongly influenced by John Ruskin's aesthetic theory and came to agree with Ruskin that "grand significance [is] implicit in nature's smallest part," the logic of which we may observe in his speaker's reflections on how small Margaret's mourning implies "grand significance" about human nature (White, "Hopkins: A Life" 63). Indeed, "Spring and Fall" exemplifies, as White observes, Ruskin's emphasis on "recording nature rather than inventing it" and on the "elegiac" vulnerability of "natural beauty" ("Hopkins: A Life" 63). White concludes that "Hopkins was at his happiest" at Oxford, although his university experience was also characterized by his religious development, which was fraught with "ascetic penances" and self-doubt about his powerful responses to painting—a favorite hobby that Hopkins gave up to avoid his "morally evil" and "profoundly dangerous" responses to art ("Hopkins: A Life" 62, 64).

Hopkins decided to become a Jesuit priest and, although his acceptance into the Society of Jesus gave him "the most complete peace of mind [he had] ever had," he was assigned a series of brief jobs throughout England and Scotland in towns that all failed to

match the ideal atmosphere of London and Hampstead where Hopkins grew up (Hopkins qtd. in White, "Hopkins: A Life" 66; White, "Hopkins: A Life" 59). Poetry seems to have provided him some comfort; for example, his poem "Duns Scotus's Oxford," which affirms the Scotus ethical justification of contemplating Beauty (White, "Hopkins: A Life" 69). Poetry even played a celebratory, epideictic role in the Jesuit tradition—according to White, "the Society of Jesus actually encouraged its members to write verse to celebrate specific religious occasions" ("Hopkins: A Life" 67).

Nonetheless, Hopkins worried about compromising his priestly responsibilities by spending too much time on poetry (Roberts 95). When he was assigned to Liverpool in 1880, his professional poems—complicated by an "excessive" workload, exhaustion, illness, dissatisfaction with the community, and Liverpool's industrial, "museless" atmosphere, which he called a 'hellhole"—felt overwhelming and stifled his creativity (White, *Hopkins: A Literary Biography* xv; Hopkins qtd. in Roberts 95, 96). He only wrote two poems during this assignment, one of which was "Spring and Fall" (Roberts 96). White implies that this poem may convey Hopkins's persistent worry about spring's return; since the beginning of his Jesuit career, Hopkins consistently wrote about "the annual crisis of spring," which he feared might fail to come and deny him its refreshment and rejuvenation, on which he relied (White, *Hopkins: A Literary Biography* 322). We might even imagine "Spring and Fall" illustrating an internal conflict between Hopkins's mature knowledge that spring will return and his somewhat childish fear that it will not via young Margaret's mourning for Goldengrove and the mature speaker's awareness that spring will return. When Hopkins writes from Liverpool in 1881 to a friend, we might

view him as poetically suggesting the dual significances that spring holds for him: "Every impulse and spring of art seems to have died in me," he writes, suggesting that spring is a season of renewal that serves as a source of artistic inspiration (qtd. in Roberts 96).

The juxtaposition of spring and death seems to have been a pervasive image in Hopkins's thinking and writing as evidenced by his journals, letters, and poems like "Spring" (written in 1877) and "Spring and Death," which Roberts identifies as a companion piece to "Spring and Fall," although the former was probably written much earlier while Hopkins was at Oxford (White*, Hopkins: A Literary Biography* 322, 275, 297; Roberts 6). Roberts finds these last two poems sharing "a characteristic Hopkins message of the mortality of human things" and of "Nature" as "the standard by which mortality is judged" (6). In keeping with Ruskin's early influences, Hopkins seems to value nature as a lens for understanding beauty, death, and personhood.

"Spring and Fall seems to mark the beginning of Hopkins's decline into pessimism and depression, which escalated in his appointment to Dublin in 1884 following a series of brief posts in Scotland and Ireland (White, "Hopkins: A Life" 71; White, *Hopkins: A Literary Biography* xvi). Hopkins's emotional strife may have enhanced if not motivated his poetry; White observes that Hopkins's wrote some of his "best poetry" during his depressing stay in Ireland ("Hopkins: A Life" 72). Barely six months before his death, however, Hopkins bemoaned the loss of his creativity, writing "I am ashamed of the little I have done . . . All my undertakings miscarry . . . I wish then for death" (qtd. in White, "Hopkins: A Life" 72). While Hopkins himself mourned his

lack of poetic creativity even in his last three poems, White points out that these poems defy Hopkins's pessimistic self-evaluation ("Hopkins: A Life" 72). Yet these last poems as well as "Spring and Fall" seem conditioned by Hopkins's frustration with the loss of his creativity. Perhaps writing poems like "Spring and Fall" was one way for Hopkins to think through the influences of nature, art, religion, and loss that coalesced in his personal experiences.

Loss also seems to have conditioned Frost's composition of "Nothing Gold Can Stay," albeit in some more indirect ways than the depressing atmosphere and lack of inspiration that conditioned Hopkins's "Spring and Fall." In *Robert Frost: A Life*, Jay Parini notes that "Nothing Gold Can Stay" grew out of a fragment composed in 1900, the same year that Frost's mother passed away and the year that Frost's young son Elliott died of cholera before his fourth birthday (Parini 201; Tuten and Zubizarreta xiv). The image of a young child facing death was a reality for Frost whereas for Hopkins the image seems to remain merely poetic—although both poets seem to find the contrast between youthful beginnings and mature endings in death to be resonant and synecdochally indicative of the ends of all loss. Frost returned to the fragment from 1900 after a trying stint at Amherst College from 1916-1919 during the last half of the World War I (Parini 201; Tuten and Zubizarreta xiv). Academic life did not suit Frost: teaching lacked the appeal—and the poetic inspiration—of farming, and Frost was plagued by administrative disputes over his position at Amherst (Parini 191). In addition, Frost fell ill for almost two months during the flu epidemic of 1918, which killed thousands of people in October alone (Parini 190). Deeply disturbed by these troubling circumstances,

Frost could not write, and he held Amherst responsible for interrupting his "real work" of composing poetry; he wrote less than six poems between 1917 and 1920 (Parini 191, 196). Like Hopkins, Frost found it almost impossible to write poetry in an un-inspiring, even oppressive situation.

Frost finally resigned from Amherst in January 1919, and after finishing the spring semester there, promptly returned to writing poetry, apparently inspired by his move to a farm in South Shaftsbury, Vermont (Parini 191, 194). Frost sent a draft of "Nothing Gold Can Stay," developed from the 1900 fragment, to a friend on March 20, 1920 (Parini 199). Unfortunately, around the same time, Frost's sister's mental illness, which had been getting increasingly worse since her enrollment in college in 1916, took a sharp turn for the worse that spring, and she was permanently institutionalized by April 1920 (Parini 199). Her debilitating illness haunted Frost because it was "too painful to withstand," and he visited only rarely before she died at the State Hospital in Augusta, Maine in 1929; her mental demise reminded Frost of the "traces of insanity" he recognized in other family members and in himself (199-200). For example, Frost's mother had exhibited "incipient insanity," and mental illnesses underlay not only his sister's institutionalization, but also his daughter's institutionalization, his son's suicide, and his own "tendency toward depression" (Parini 9, 199, 376, 332, 444). Although many of these losses and illnesses followed Frost's completion of "Nothing Gold Can Stay," Frost was well-acquainted with the ephemerality of meaningful presences.

As a testament to the brilliance of the precarious, "Nothing Gold Can Stay" was published in 1923 in Frost's Pulitzer Prize-winning collection *New Hampshire* (Tuten

and Zubizarreta xiv) and is now an anthology piece that has found a place in the American poetic memory, as S. E. Hinton's allusions to it in *The Outsiders* attest.

When Hinton's characters Johnny and Ponyboy hide out in an abandoned church because Johnny killed a Soc who had attacked Ponyboy, the cold weather wakes the boys up early enough to watch a beautiful sunrise, which prompts Ponyboy to recite Frost's "Nothing Gold Can Stay" (76-77). Hinton includes the entire poem in her novel, and has Ponyboy explain, "Robert Frost wrote it . . . I always remembered it because I never quite got what it meant" (78). At the end of the novel, after Johnny dies from injuries he incurred while saving children from a fire, Ponyboy finds a letter Johnny left him; Johnny remembers Frost's poem, explaining "*that poem, that guy that wrote it, he meant you're gold when you're a kid, like green. When you're a kid everything's new, dawn. It's just when you get used to everything that it's day. Like the way you dig sunsets, Pony. That's gold. Keep that way, it's a good way to be*" (Hinton 178). By portraying characters who remember Frost's poem and use it to make sense of their experiences of loss, Hinton introduces Frost's poems to her readers, inviting them to at least remember Frost's poem if not also use it to make sense of their own losses. Francis Ford Coppola's film adaptation of the novel includes Hinton's allusions to Frost, introducing the poem to audiences who may not have read Frost's poem or Hinton's novel; the film also emphasizes Frost's theme by beginning the film with the song "Stay Gold." The enduring cultural presence of "Nothing Gold Can Stay" suggests that loss and absence motivate or construct connections with others, although such connections may always be attenuated by their ties to loss and absence.

Rhetorical Losses and Poetic Dialogues

Themes of loss and separation are conveyed in both poems' titles. Hopkins's title connotes the autumnal setting and its relation to spring—a tension that, especially in light of Hopkins's persistent anxiety over "the crisis of spring," invokes relationships between life and death, between becoming and declining, and perhaps even between creativity/vitality and artistic paralysis (Myers 585; White, *Hopkins: A Literary Biography* 322; Nixon 479). While these oppositions may seem to emphasize their separation or difference from each other, John A. Myers observes that the title "suggests that fall and spring are somehow connected or involved in one another . . . " which prompts the reader to consider not only how spring and fall are connected, but also how life and death, the processes of becoming and decay, may also be mutually constitutive (585). These pairs are connected through their differences—in a sense, death is the loss of life, declining is the loss of becoming, and fall is the loss of spring-time growth. The title of the poem not only connotes seasons and the poem's autumnal setting, but also symbolizes the age difference between the characters—the young Margaret, whose name means "daisy" and thereby associates her with spring, and the older, more jaded narrator (Myers 585; Wardi 245). Hopkins's title also suggests the fall from grace in the Judeo-Christian tradition and Adam and Eve's exile from Eden, which is connoted in Hopkins's term "Goldengrove," as Eynel Wardi, Roger L. Slakey, Gerard A. Pilecki and others observe (Wardi 244). The shift from innocence to experience is another often-

emphasized theme, affirmed by Wardi, Slakey, and Lorraine Wynne.[3] These tensions between innocence and experience, life and death, etc. all seem to turn on various kinds of loss—each tension is a variation on the theme of absence vs. presence.

Frost's title, "Nothing Gold Can Stay" emphasizes loss through arguing in the negative that nothing "Gold" or precious/valuable endures; re-stated positively, the title argues that everything valuable passes away, changes, and/or is lost. The title's reference to "Gold" not only anticipates the poem's focus on early spring-time leaves, but also hints at the gold leaves of autumn, subtly connoting the tension between spring and fall

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3. Wardi indicates that Margaret's "enabling innocence" allows her to care for Goldengrove's leaves and to "intuitively" feel the true source of her mourning—i.e. the "blight" of mortality (Wardi 237; Hopkins 14). Wardi extends the poem's "manifest context of the 'fall' from childhood innocence to adult experience' by addressing Hopkins's cultural context in order to analyze his "poetics of empathy" (238). Slakey cites critics Sister Robert Louise, Sister Casalandra, and John Nist, who suggest Margaret mourns for sin and "the loss of original innocence," to contextualize his question, "What is the relation between weeping and knowing?" (23, 31). Slakey suggests that Margaret "may learn of the immersion in self" through her experience that the poem describes, but concludes that "she may never weep" for this self-immersion that is the "ultimate" but not immediate "cause of sorrow" (31). In addition, Lorraine Wynne uses the innocence vs. experience dichotomy as a foil for her reading of "Spring and Fall" as emphasizing apprehension, reason, hope, life, and death. Wynne draws on James F. Cotter's theory of personal myth to define Hopkins's mythopoesis as "the personal, poetical myth of *acquisition of knowledge of the transcendental, Christocentric world*" based on Hopkins's Catholic faith (49, 52, 51). She then applies this mythopoetic code to "Spring and Fall," arguing that without this code, the poem suggests that "youth, innocent of experience of death, grieves through direct observation of loss outside of itself . . . but cannot name the grief stimulus . . . although the nature of grief is intuitively grasped" while "the repeated experience acquired with age permits" the mature observer "to know the true nature of human sorrow" (Wynne 58). This emphasis on grief and mortality changes, however, when we read the poem through the mythopoetic code, which invokes a "semantic universe" that is "transcendental" instead of "phenomenal," ultimately transforming signs of "*innocence*" and "*experience*" into those of understanding and "*identity*," and signs of "*sorrow*" and "*decay*" into "*hope*" and "*death*" in order to emphasize the "ultimate union with" Christ on which Hopkins mythopoesis centers (Wynne 58, 60). Wardi, Slakey, and Wynne all affirm the significance that the poem places on the shift from innocence to experience.

that Hopkins explicitly addresses (Sanders and Vogel 239-240). While Hopkins's names specific seasons that symbolize more universal contrasts, such as youth vs. maturity, Frost's universal term "Nothing" explicitly invokes absence and orients the poem towards the nature of loss in general. Frost ties the nature of loss to Eden and the fall from grace in the poem's body, as Hopkins's does implicitly. Although Hopkins never names Eden explicitly, his term "Goldengrove" has often been interpreted by scholars like Eynel Wardi, Roger L. Slakey, and Gerard A. Pilecki as alluding to Eden (G. Hopkins, "Spring" 2; Wardi 244). In light of Hopkins's "Goldengrove," the "Gold" in Frost's title seems to anticipate his explicit reference to "Eden" in line six (G. Hopkins, "Spring" 2). Frost's title emphasizes loss in general whereas Hopkins's title connotes the loss that underlies opposites. By framing loss as a kind of common ground connecting a thing and its absence or opposite, Hopkins lends loss a more dialogic, rhetorical tint than Frost does.

Loss and separation certainly underlie many critics' interpretations of Hopkins's poem—Myers's focus on "the fall from innocence" (587), Wynne's definition of "losing" as "the mark of identity" in Hopkins's mythopoesis (55), Wardi's discussion of the poem's metapoetic emphasis on empathy as the poet's aim (247), Gerard A. Pilecki's observation of spiritual modes of knowing (91), and Paul C. Doherty's emphasis on the reader's view of "the full cycle of death and rebirth" represented in Hopkins's poem (143). While Doherty and Wardi treat "Spring and Fall" as a dramatic monologue, none of these critics has emphasized the poem as a piece of rhetoric that persuades readers to view personhood as centered on loss, death, and separation. A rhetorical reading of

"Spring and Fall" may show that the rhetorical, dialogic relationship that Hopkins constructs with his readers demonstrates how separations of loss and death can give rise to meaningful connections with others. Through its rhetorical effects on readers, "Spring and Fall" presents a philosophical view of rhetorical personhood—a way of being constituted both by loss and by connections that follow from the exigence of separation.

For example, the poem's subtitle, "To a Young Child," frames the poem as a dialogue, even though some critics, like Myers, conclude that the narrator does not explicitly address Margaret, but rather only muses internally on human life and death, engaging in a reverie prompted by Margaret's grief (586). This dialogic frame, like other themes in the poem, develops as the poem continues, specifically through the speaker's rhetorical questions and direct address to Margaret (G. Hopkins, "Spring" 1-4, 15). The dialogic juxtaposition of Margaret and the narrator may reflect a tension in Hopkins's own fearful attitude toward spring, which, as an adult, he knows will return but nevertheless fears, perhaps childishly, will not. Hopkins might feel internally conflicted by adult knowledge and childish fears. The poem's dialogic frame—which itself turns on separation and difference between Margaret and the narrator—invites us to view thematic tensions in the poem (life vs. death, growth vs. decay, innocence vs. experience, etc.) as functioning dialogically themselves. Like dialogue, oppositions between life and death, growth and decay, etc. are defined both by separation and connection. Since dialogue is a way of transforming separation between people into a conversational connection, the poem's emphasis on dialogue reiterates the poem's

meditation on the problem of separation—how it always conditions connections and its attendant attitudes, including sorrow, mourning, and narcissism.

Separation or the loss of connection with others seems to be the fundamental problem of personhood for Hopkins—which may not be simply a religious issue, but also a rhetorical one insofar as separation serves as the exigence for rhetoric. For Hopkins, separation plagues personhood in a variety of ways that seem to align with rhetoric: Separation plagues personhood through narcissism, through death, through the self's incommunicability, and through other losses of connection with people. Hopkins served as Professor of Rhetoric at Roehampton in 1874, teaching a rhetoric course based in the Greek and Latin traditions during a one-year reprieve from his own studies to become a priest, and his own rhetoric background may have shaped his imagination of "Spring and Fall," whether or not he is consciously or intentionally trying to argue about rhetoric in the poem (White, *Hopkins: A Literary Biography* 215-216). If we read "Spring and Fall" rhetorically, however, we may uncover some of its ethical implications. These ethical implications arise in part from Hopkins's attention to rhetorical separation as a source of mourning; in turn, mourning seems to reflect, for Hopkins, how personhood is conditioned by separation, including loss and death. Mourning and other emotions may also be a means of connecting with others and thereby overcoming separation.

Dialogue is more subtly absent in Frost's "Nothing Gold Can Stay." The poem seems to lack a definitive, personal voice without the second-person voice of Hopkins's "Spring and Fall" or the first-person voice of poems like "Desert Places." For example,

the speaker of "Desert Places" explicitly describes his absence in the first-person voice: "I am too absent-spirited to count" (Frost, "Desert Places" line 7). The absence of such a personal voice in "Nothing Gold Can Stay" seems both to identify the speaker and Frost closely with each other, and to lend the poem universality, as if anyone or possibly everyone could be observing these losses in nature. Critics Guo Ping and Brian M. Reed do characterize the speaker of "Nothing Gold Can Stay" as "a solitary speaker in quest of truth," a "portrait" in line with their depiction of the poem as an emphatically philosophical endeavor (114). Ping and Reed also emphasize that the "poem makes us [readers] feel present at the events it describes" through the monosyllabic words that describe the natural landscape (115). In making the reader "feel present" at the poem's events, Frost's descriptions may indirectly invite the reader to identify with the speaker's point of view—to see nature through the speaker's gaze, and, since the poem seems to identify the speaker with Frost himself, through Frost's gaze.

The speaker's impersonal voice and de-emphasized presence may further amplify the reader's presence, as if an inverting a conventional speaker-listener dialogue dominated by the speaker (as in Christina Rossetti's "Remember"). The speaker-listener relationship in "Nothing Gold Can Stay" also seems compressed by Frost's emphasis on the reader's presence, which in turn seems to emphasize the writer-reader over the speaker-listener relationship. The reader's presence and may almost eclipse such dialogic relationships altogether since the reader identifies so closely with the speaker's—and Frost's—gaze. The poem seems to occlude dialogue and separation by identifying the speaker so strongly with Frost, and the reader so strongly with the speaker. These

identifications emphasize identity, solidarity, and unity in ways that obscure the dialogic relationships on which such connections depend. Frost diminishes the dialogic relationships invoked through the poem's rhetorical situation in order to emphasize the unity to which they give rise. The rhetorical situation of Hopkins's poem also facilitates connections, especially the writer-reader connection, but Hopkins draws attention to dialogue's role in evoking such connections. Both Hopkins and Frost seem to use their poems' rhetorical situations to make connections present, countering their poems' elegiac descriptions of loss and absence with hopeful presences.

The Problem of Loss as a Reminder of Death

Loss is conveyed through several elements of Hopkins's and Frost's poems. Hopkins's poem connotes the loss of vitality in the autumn setting, the loss of leaves in "Goldengrove's unleaving" specifically, the loss conveyed in the "worlds of wanwood" lying "leafmeal" instead of whole, the loss of innocence and sensitivity to loss "as the heart grows older" and colder, the loss of health implied in the "blight" metaphor, the loss of explicit knowledge that neither "mouth had, no nor mind expressed," and even the loss of complete certainty/clarity about Margaret's motive for mourning, which scholars' diverse interpretations of her mourning affirm (G. Hopkins, "Spring" 2, 8, 5-6, 14, 12). Similar losses permeate Frost's poem: the loss of enduring color implied by the description "Her hardest hue to hold," the loss of extended time in the phrase "only so an hour," "the loss of earliness to a grosser lateness" (Berger 154) implied by adjectives like "first" and "early," the losses implied by the "verbs of descent" ("subsides," "sank," and "goes down") (Sanders and Vogel 239), the response to loss implied in "grief," "the loss

of the gold leaves of early Spring," and "the loss of the beauties of Eden and dawn" (Frost, "Nothing" 2, 4, 1, 3, 5-7; Cureton 43). Indeed, "the inevitable loss of 'first fruits' is the main "message" of "Nothing Gold Can Stay," according to Richard D. Cureton—a characterization that also seems well-suited to Hopkins's "Spring and Fall" (38). Julian Smith finds formal loss in "Spring and Fall," observing that line 9 interrupts both the otherwise consistent rhyme scheme and conventional sonnet form (0). In "Nothing Gold," Frost emphasizes brevity and ephemerality formally through short, monosyllabic words, short sentences, and even through the brevity of the 8-line poem itself (Ping and Reed 115-116).

In "Spring and Fall," loss is also implied in the ambiguous connection between Margaret and the narrator. Lorraine Wynne and I. A. Richards both indicate that the speaker is most likely having an internal dialogue with himself, prompted by Margaret's grief. Wynne explains that the poem reflects an "inner," self-directed "discourse"—a "reverie," according to Gerard A. Pilecki (Wynne 59; Pilecki 88). John A. Myers, Jr. emphasizes that the speaker "is *not*" literally speaking to Margaret but "is merely musing out loud" since "Margaret would hardly understand" his philosophical speculations (586). These emphases on the speaker's internal reflections describe his disconnection from Margaret, a loss of connection that seems paradoxical given that the subtitle, "To a Young Child," explicitly addresses the poem to the child. This loss that apparently interrupts or defers the poem's dialogic structure invites us to view other differences, like those between spring and fall, life and death, growth and decay, as oppositions also defined by loss (at least loss of identity, if not of connection). Like Hopkins's narrator,

Frost's speaker also seems to reflect internally, although his reflections seem to have an opposite effect in that they may invite the reader to identify closely with the speaker's view, whereas the internal reflections of Hopkins's narrator seem to separate him from the child he watches, the audience to whom the poem is explicitly addressed.

Both Hopkins and Frost negotiate universality and loss through synecdoche. In Hopkins's poem, the comparatively older speaker views Margaret's grief for Goldengrove synecdochally, as representing an element of universal human experience, explaining that Margaret, like other people, will herself grow "colder" as she matures and no longer mourns for trivial losses like autumn leaves or even for the greater losses conveyed through the metaphor "worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie" (G. Hopkins, "Spring" 6, 8). The speaker seems to characterize Margaret's grief as one part of a larger, universal pattern of human growth—emphasized through impersonal terms such as "*the* heart"—giving an account of maturity that seems implicitly to include Hopkins's reader (5, emphasis mine). The reader's feeling that the speaker attempts to account for her experience as well enhances her sense that the speaker's account aims for universality. By inviting the reader to identify with his universal account of mourning—which Margaret represents—Hopkins's speaker emphasizes seemingly universal aspects of Margaret's mourning and the way that all encounters with loss remind us of our own inevitable deaths.

The speaker universalizes both the process of maturing and the sources of mourning—maturing always involves a loss of innocence and sensitivity to loss, and mourning always implies a response to one's own death. Although the speaker

acknowledges that, in the process of maturing, people stop mourning for losses that they come to see as trivial, he emphasizes that "[s]órrow's sprírngs áre all the same" (G. Hopkins, "Spring" 11). All mourning shares the same exigence—the mourner's own losses, especially the ultimate loss of her own life. The speaker suggests that all mourning is essentially for one's own mortality, "no matter" what "name" is given to mourning or towards what external loss it seems to be addressed (G. Hopkins, "Spring" 10). All encounters with loss that evoke mourning, whatever form that mourning may take, thus imply the mourner's response to her own mortality. All loss implicitly reminds us of our own death, Hopkins suggests.

Frost seems to agree with Hopkins that all loss reminds us of our own deaths, and, as in Hopkins's poem, synecdoche plays a crucial role in Frost's argument. Frost uses synecdoche to identify all kinds of particular losses with each other, including the loss of our own lives, our own mortality. For Frost's speaker, the transition from nature's "early," golden flower in spring to the "green . . . leaf" it becomes synecdochally symbolizes all loss ("Nothing" 2, 1, 5). The poem conveys a synecdochal logic as its descriptions expand from the loss of the flower to the loss of leaves, the loss of Eden, the original—even universal—loss in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Not only does the flower's transition into a leaf seem to symbolize all forms of loss implicit in change (as Sister M. Bernetta Quinn suggests, the poem is about "transience" (622)), but also each line of the poem itself seems to represent the poem's message about loss writ small. Donald C. Freeman characterizes "Nothing Gold Can Stay" as "a hologram . . . a poem in which each of the smallest subparts means the same as the whole" (131). For example,

the line "Then leaf subsides to leaf" seems to convey the loss of the flower turning into a leaf, the loss of green leaves turning gold and dying in autumn, and the loss that is always invoked through identification (Frost, "Nothing" 5). Frost's repetition of the word "leaf" seems to equate the two words and their referents, suggesting that, at least on the level of diction, there is no loss—as if the speaker is trying to resist the very phenomena of loss and change that he describes. Even though word "leaf" is repeated, the first instance seems to refer both to the flower as the "early" leaf and to the leaf that the flower becomes, which itself will become the dying autumn leaf. Frost demonstrates that even one thing changes and undergoes loss, and that even our attempts to identify similar things simply de-emphasize the loss or separation that endures. Line five thus seems to function synecdochally in relation to the entire poem, much like the speaker views the flower as synecdochally representative of all loss—much like Hopkins's speaker views Margaret, the "daisy," as synecdochally representative of all human mourning (Wardi 245).

Synecdoche defines Frost's "artistic approach," as Quinn, and Sanders and Vogel indicate, and Ping and Reed suggest this trope embodies the poetic project when they quote Samuel Hazo: "True poets see the man in the one and vice versa so that their focus is always on whatness, not muchness" (Hazo qtd. in Ping and Reed 119). Through synecdoche, Frost illustrates that all presence implies its own loss and absence. When we read Frost alongside Hopkins, we see Frost affirming that loss reminds us of our own deaths, of Eden's "grief" and our mortality ("Nothing" 6). The "sense of loss," including the awareness of our own deaths, and "sorrow" that "Nothing Gold Can Stay" leaves

with its reader can invoke further losses, Hopkins suggests, especially the loss of connection with others (Sanders and Vogel 239; Ping and Reed 119).

Loss, Death, and Narcissism

People are fundamentally separated from others, Hopkins indicates, not only in the universal experience of death, but also in mourning, an emotion that disconnects us from others because it is ultimately self-oriented and can never be purely about the other. The paradoxical tension between all mourning's universal exigence and all mourners' essentially self-oriented grief resonates in the final lines: "It ís the blight man was born for/It is Margaret you mourn for" (G. Hopkins, "Spring" 14-15). Situating Margaret as a synecdochal figure for "man" in the universal sense, these lines argue that Margaret, like all people, mourns ultimately for herself, for her own mortality (G. Hopkins, "Spring" 14). By naming her specifically, Hopkins emphasizes her individuality in its separation and isolation from other people. The "blight" of humankind thus first includes the condition of mortality, and second, includes the condition of mourning primarily for oneself (Hopkins 14). Mortality and self-oriented mourning both describe the condition of being disconnected from other people. If all mourning truly is about oneself, then that condition implies that people, who cannot genuinely mourn or appreciate others' absences, may not be able genuinely to appreciate others' presences as well. Mourning seems to reveal a condition of separation from or the loss of connection with others that defines personhood for Hopkins's speaker. This condition of separation seems to insinuate itself to us in encounters with loss and death.

Self-oriented mourning and its attendant condition of separation seem to imply that mourning entails a narcissistic attitude toward the world. In his cornerstone work, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats,* Peter Sacks describes narcissism as an integral part of the Freudian "work of mourning," explaining that mourners may revert back to an infantile state of narcissism in response to "the threat of death" emphasized by the loss of a loved one (10).[4] Sacks's Freudian version of narcissism refers to a state in which the loss of a love object has disrupted the mourner's healthy recognition of and emotional attachment to external reality. When loss severs the mourner's emotional attachment to the love object, which is no longer there, the mourner may re-attach her emotions to her own self instead of to an external object, conflating her internal ego with external reality. This projection of her ego and emotions onto external reality results in narcissism as a self-centered view of—and emotional response to—the world. Hopkins suggests that Margaret's mourning, like all mourning, is narcissistic by claiming that she mourns only for herself—that her emotional attachment

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4. Sacks suggests that "the threat of death" may "drive the mourner back to the earlier form of narcissism" that characterizes the mirror stage of infancy (10, 9). This stage, which follows the child's primary, "undifferentiated union" with her mother, entails the child's recognition of an external "idealized image" of herself, either in literal mirror images or in other people (Sacks 9). The child fails, however, to recognize fully the exteriority of this self-image, attaching her emotions to it and mistakenly feeling herself "to possess. . . . [its] integrity and functional completeness . . ." (Sacks 9). The child thus remains bound to "a condition of primary narcissism" in this stage, although Sacks claims it is a stepping stone toward a healthy "formalized identity" (10). The mourner may regress to this narcissistic stage, suggests Sacks, if she withdraws her emotions—or libido—from the lost dead and then reattaches that emotion to herself instead of to an external object (10). This reattachment of emotion to the self/ego defines Freud's theory of melancholia, which he claims "borrows some of its features from mourning, and others from the process of regression from narcissistic object-choice to narcissism" (250).

to Goldengrove's leaves is superficial and merely implies her fundamental emotional investment in herself and her own death.

The "pervasive elegiac tone" of "Nothing Gold Can Stay" seems to express the speaker's own narcissistic mourning (Sanders and Vogel 240). The speaker may project his own sense of loss onto the landscape much as the speaker of "Desert Places" projects his "loneliness" onto his wintry surroundings (Frost, "Desert Places" 8). Although the speaker of "Desert Places" more overtly personifies the "lonely" landscape "[w]ith no expression, nothing to express," the speaker of "Nothing Gold Can Stay" seems subtly to project his own "grief" onto the spring-time scene in the sense that he recognizes loss more readily than presence (Frost, "Desert Places" 9, 12; "Nothing" 6). In "Nothing Gold Can Stay," the "cycle of the seasons seems bent on destruction" and "the downward movement" toward death "begins almost immediately" observes Roberts W. French, in contrast to "[c]onventional thought" that the natural "pattern . . . moves from birth (spring) to maturity (summer) through aging (autumn) to death (winter)" with the possibility of rebirth (158). Although critics like Quinn and Freeman recognize in the poem the "promise of natural rebirth," the poem seems to focus primarily on loss, as the title and final line imply that "[n]othing gold," not even rebirth itself or cycles of renewal, "can stay" (Freeman 131; Frost, "Nothing" 8). This pessimistic focus on loss may reflect the speaker's own mournful attitude. Quinn suggests that Frost "pay[s] tribute . . . to the importance of the human consciousness within a landscape," affirming the speaker's projection of himself onto the landscape much like, as Slakey claims, Margaret "projects on the grove losing its leaves . . . the loss of Eden" via her "eye

informed by self" (Quinn 623; Slakey 28). Both Frost's speaker and Margaret seem to project themselves onto their surrounding landscapes because they both mourn narcissistically.

Like Frost's speaker, Margaret also seems to ignore or be unaware of the natural cycle of renewal and rebirth. She mourns for the dying autumn leaves, but "Goldengrove['s] unleaving" is part of the natural cycle of renewal—new leaves will return in the spring, but Margaret seems to see only permanent death (G. Hopkins, "Spring" 2). Margaret responds to the autumn leaves as if they were a sign of a "blight," a term which denotes, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, a lethal disease of plants ("Blight").[5] Margaret's grief for the autumn leaves implies her focus on death, as if the trees themselves were dying from a blight, instead of merely shedding their leaves in their annual cycle of renewal. Since the trees are not actually dying, Margaret mourns for her own death—and, by implication, for the "blight" of human death—according to Hopkins's narrator (14). Hopkins's metaphorical use of "blight" to describe human mortality differentiates mortality from the trees' cyclic loss of leaves (14). Margaret's inattention to Goldengrove's cycle of renewal suggests that she projects her own sense of permanent loss onto Goldengrove. Hopkins emphasizes Margaret's process of projection by metaphorically identifying her death with an arboreal "blight" (14). As Margaret views her own death in terms of Goldengrove's falling leaves, Hopkins in turn identifies her death in terms of arboreal death. Margaret's projects her own sense of death onto

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5. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "blight" as "[a]ny baleful influence of atmospheric or invisible origin, that suddenly . . . destroys plants, affects them with disease, arrests their growth . . . a diseased state of plants . . ." ("Blight"). "Blight" can also refer specifically to a "species of aphis, destructive to fruit trees" ("Blight").

Goldengrove much as Frost's speaker seems to project his own sense of loss onto nature through his own diminished attention to nature's cyclical renewal.

Unlike Frost's speaker, Margaret's youthfulness seems to contribute to her grief according to the narrator's interpretation of her "fresh thoughts" that allow her to "care for" leaves now, before her "heart grows older" and "colder" (G. Hopkins, "Spring" 4-6). Youthfulness is characterized by narcissism that makes loss more acute, as, for example, in an infant's narcissistic "mirror stage" of development (Sacks 9-10). Sacks explains that the mirror stage, which follows the child's primary, "undifferentiated union" with her mother, entails the child's attempts to recognize an external "idealized image" of herself, either in literal mirror images or in other people (Sacks 9). The child fails, however, to recognize fully the exteriority of this self-image, attaching her emotions to it and mistakenly feeling herself "to possess. . . . [its] integrity and functional completeness . . ." (Sacks 9). The child thus remains bound to "a condition of primary narcissism" in this stage, although Sacks claims it is a stepping stone toward a healthy "formalized identity" (10).

Sacks also emphasizes the mirror stage's mournful character as the child, who in beginning to distinguish herself from others, "'master[s]'" the absence of her mother (Freud qtd. in Sacks 10). Freud describes how this mastery of or way of coping with the loss of a loved one occurred in the *fort-da* game that his grandson played (Sacks 10). When the child's mother left the room, Freud's grandson "controlled his anger and grief" by repeatedly casting out a toy reel while saying "*fort*" and then retrieving it while saying "*da*" (Sacks 11). The syllables "*fort*" and "*da*," Freud interpreted, signified "gone"

or absence and "here" or returned presence, while the reel itself symbolized the mother (Sacks 11).This game facilitated the child's "acquiescence to separation from his mother," and thereby facilitated his recognition that absence and loss are not always permanent—that his mother and other loved ones would return (Sacks 11). Similarly, as a child becomes aware of object permanence beyond her perceptions, as, for example, when she realizes that a cup hidden behind a box is still there even though she cannot see it, she moves beyond a narcissistic phase in which anything not immediately present or perceptible by her has lost forever, vanished from reality.

Although these developmental stages seem to reflect the immaturity of a narcissistic world view, they may also reflect a reality of human presence—that beloved people and things will not always return, that loss is sometimes final, and, in the end, is final for each of us in our own deaths, which prevent us from returning or experiencing others' returns. For example, death would prevent Margaret from experiencing the return of springtime leaves and Frost's speaker from experiencing the return of spring's early golden flowers. The awareness of their own deaths thus seems to motivate their inappropriately mournful responses to nature, as Hopkins's narrator observes about Margaret's grief.

Their narcissistic projection of their own fear of death onto nature, however, may reveal a reality in nature as well. The autumn leaves that Margaret mourns will be lost forever—those same leaves will not return rejuvenated in the spring.[6] Margaret and

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6. Instead, they will decay and enrich the soil, nourishing the trees and indirectly feeding the new spring foliage. Such natural renewal itself seems temporary in the big

Frost's speaker focus on the loss of specific leaves and flowers, however, may reflect more emphatically Margaret's and Frost's speaker's sense of their own specificity and uniqueness, which their own deaths will end. Such focus on the specific, the particular may always reflect our narcissistic fears of our own deaths, although Ping and Reed suggest that such "concern for the particular" is a defining trait of the poet (119). The similarities between Margaret's and Frost's speaker's mournful projections suggest, as Freud recognizes, that narcissism perseveres through adulthood, in melancholia specifically for Freud, despite the changes this attitude may undergo as a person matures (250). Sacks agrees that the adult mourner may regress to an infantile, narcissistic stage if she withdraws her emotions—or libido—from the lost dead and then reattaches that emotion to herself instead of to an external object (10). Narcissism's persistent presence in mourning of people of all ages demonstrates continuity between youthful and mature attitudes toward loss.

Narcissism may be an essential part of mourning not only for Margaret and Frost's speaker, but also for all mourners. Such narcissistic mourning, according to Hopkins's speaker, implies the mourner's separation from others, which he seems to view as a fundamental condition of subjectivity. Narcissism may underlie all emotions, according to Levinas, who explains that "emotion is always emotion for something moving you, but also emotion for oneself. Emotion therefore consists in being moved—being . . . overjoyed by something, saddened by something, but also in feeling joy or sadness for oneself" ("Ethics" 84). Emotion is always partly about oneself because

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picture since there may come a time when nature and our planet as we know it ceases to exist. Even then the death of our planet may contribute to larger cycles of the cosmos.

emotion is always motivated in part by fear for one's own death; as Levinas claims, "All affectivity . . . has repercussions for my being-for-death . . . so there is a turning back on oneself and a return to anguish for oneself" ("Ethics" 84). Anguish or fear for our own deaths may manifest itself in all emotion because we attend to and are moved by things that maybe potentially lost, if only to our attention. Vulnerability may always contribute to directing our attention and emotions to one thing instead of another, and the vulnerability of other things reminds us of our own vulnerability to death. Because emotion is always partly one's own death, it seems to prevent us from being genuinely about others and thereby from being genuinely connected to others. Levinas thus seems to affirm Hopkins's sense that personhood seems "blight[ed]" by the problem of separation from others (G. Hopkins, "Spring" 14).

Narcissistic fear for one's own death, however, may not entirely separate us from others. Although Levinas juxtaposes fear for one's own death with "[f]ear for the other man's death," which is the ethical, responsible attitude, such concern for others may be implied in one's fear for her own death ("Ethics" 84-85). Fear for someone else's death entails attending to the "injustice which inheres, at least potentially, in every death" for Levinas (Spargo, *Vigilant Memory* 64). Injustice implies a network of relations, a context that includes others for whom justice may exist, others who determine what does and does not count as just, and others who may fall victim to injustice, especially in death. Justice and injustice are communal, which Levinas recognizes in his assumption that "every subject exists in some socio-structural relation to injustice" (Spargo, *Vigilant*

Memory 64). For Levinas, the communal context of injustice compels the subject's responsibility for protecting the other from injustice, to which she is vulnerable.

The subject herself, however, may also fall victim to injustice, and injustice may inhere in her death as well as in the other's death. In one sense, my death is unjust because death separates me from the other for whom I care, for whom I am responsible, and to whom I am bound—death deprives me of my capacity for responsibility, of my ability to respond and connect to others. In a Levinasian sense, death may inflict injustice upon the subject by depriving her of her ability to respond and connect to others. In the event of death, the subject loses her ability "*to be able*," her human agency and capacity for responsibility (Levinas, "Time" 42, 47). In describing "our relationship with death," ("Time" 41), Levinas explains, "What is important about the approach of death is that at a certain moment we are no longer *able to be able* . . . It is exactly thus that the subject loses her mastery as a subject" ("Time" 42). Although the ultimate loss of such "mastery as a subject" would be the experience of dying, Levinas suggests that such "mastery" may be inhibited in experiences of suffering, pain, and sorrow ("Time" 39). While we are alive, death signifies the loss of this "mastery" or ability "*to be able*," and it is the threat of this loss, or even of experiences of its partial loss, that terrify us ("Time" 42). Levinas describes the meaning that the threat of death holds for us due to the nature of the event of death and what happens in the experience of dying.

Levinas explains, "When death is here, I am no longer here, not just because I am nothingness, but because I am unable to grasp," no longer able to create connections, to act responsibly, or to make meaningful relationships ("Time" 41). Alternatively, to

vanquish death "is to maintain, with the alterity of the event, a relationship that must still be personal," to maintain personal, meaningful relationships through death (Levinas, "Ethics" 47). For example, Levinas suggests that personal relationships may be preserved by sacrificing one's own life to protect the other, as if self-sacrifice invokes a "'non-separation in death'" by transforming an event of separation into an act of responsible connection ("Dying For" 215). When death robs the subject of her ability "*to be able*," of her capacity for responsibility, injustice may inhere in the subject's death as well as in the other's death.

If injustice may inhere in one's own death, then mourning for one's own death my express one's attitude toward injustice. By attending to injustice, the subject already orients herself toward community, toward the communal contexts of justice. Mourning for our own deaths may thus exceed narcissism by expressing our attention to the communal, responsible element of our own deaths. In this respect, mourning may imply our communal, responsible nature that precedes our own individuality, according to Levinas. This communal aspect of self-mourning entails mourning the loss of our connections with others. Since such loss of connection is also a fundamental concern for rhetoric, then mourning may also reflect a rhetorical attitude.

If we read Hopkins's and Frost's poems rhetorically, then we may find that, although the poems seem to argue explicitly that loss and separation define personhood, they also demonstrate how mourning and other emotions can create genuine connections between people. The rhetorics of "Spring and Fall" and "Nothing Gold Can Stay"

suggest that poetry can rhetorically evoke emotional connections and, in doing so, affirm personal presences.

From Rhetorical Loss to Emotional Connection

Loss is foregrounded in the opening question of "Spring and Fall," "Margaret, are your grieving/Over Goldengrove unleaving?" which orients the poem around grief and separation—but, if we read it rhetorically, the question also presents an opportunity for connection (Hopkins 1). The question of why Margaret grieves is most readily answered by the rhetoric of the question itself: Margaret does grieve for "Goldengrove unleaving" (G. Hopkins, "Spring" 1). In this respect, the question is rhetorical in that it is an observation presented as a question for the effect it will have on the audience. In his essay "Rhetoric and Functionality in Hopkins," Brian Vickers identifies the functionality of rhetoric as the capacity of language to create affective connections between writers and readers. Rhetorical devices like metaphor and simile express the writer's feelings "in a way that would arouse" or impress "the same feelings in the audience," and thus create an affective connection between writer and audience (Vickers 80). By cultivating such emotional similarity between writers and readers, rhetoric entails "an awareness of the reciprocal effects of writer on audience, audience on writer" (Vickers 101). Hopkins' question reflects such reciprocity between the speaker and Margaret in terms of her grief.

The speaker's opening question reciprocates Margaret's grief by reflecting it back to her in a form that invites a response. By asking the question, the speaker indicates that he has been moved, affected by her grief. His recognition of her grief partially coincides

with her grief itself, reciprocating her effect on him by, at least implicitly, inviting her to reflect on her grief with him. Even as a rhetorical question, it still participates in reciprocal effects between the speaker and Margaret, affirming an emotional connection between them as both parties direct their attention toward grief. As Kenneth Burke explains, we may identify two people who share "common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them *consubstantial*" (*RM* 21). We may identify Margaret and Hopkins's speaker in terms of their shared "attitudes" of mourning, even if they do not actually converse with each other (*RM* 21).

The rhetorical, emotional dimension of the question does not, however, preclude its retaining a sincere meaning too. The speaker's reflections throughout the poem suggest that, in another respect, the question is quite genuine since the speaker considers other possible motives of mourning later in the poem. Insofar as the speaker seems to pose the opening question directly to Margaret herself, he kindly recognizes her grief in a humble question rather than a statement (like "I see you grieving" that seems to risk embarrassing and alienating a grieving audience, inhibiting connection with her). By asking Margaret about her grief, the speaker invites a response from her, thereby de-centering his own ego.[7] Through the structure of a question, the speaker implicitly admits that he might be mistaken about Margaret's grief. He acknowledges that he cannot know her grief on his own; his knowledge is limited and needs to be supplemented at least in part by dialogue with Margaret. The question seems to entail

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7. Even if the question is asked ironically, as Eynel Wardi suggests, the force of the irony turns on the invitation for a response (241). The condescending or patronizing tone of such an "ironical" question undermines the sincerity of the invitation for a response, reaffirming the speaker's ego and alienating the audience (Wardi 241).

simultaneously both a gesture of care for Margaret and an acknowledgement of the speaker's own epistemological limits. The speaker seems curious about Margaret's grief, but also moved by it as well. Grief still serves as the impetus for the speaker's desire to know about Margaret, as the question emphasizes. The rhetorical and sincere meanings of the question are not mutually exclusive; rather, the rhetorical meaning creates an emotional connection that seems necessary for further discussion about why exactly Margaret mourns. The rhetorical meaning creates an emotional connection that enhances the audience's ability to respond to the question's sincere meaning.

The ambiguity about whether or not the speaker actually addresses Margaret indicates that the speaker himself may be mourning as well. For example, Wynne argues that the speaker is most likely having an internal dialogue with himself, explaining that the poem reflects his "inner," self-directed "discourse" (59). This discourse involves "the mental progress of a single mind seeking the mark and expression of its identity with the Christocentric cosmos" (Wynne 59). This "single mind" searching for "identity" thus assumes a dialogic structure—even if the dialogue is only internal (Wynne 59). The rhetorical and sincere meanings of the question still hold in such an inner dialogue, although their effects may vary slightly if we consider the speaker as the primary audience of his own inner dialogue. For example, the affective connections that, according to Vickers, rhetoric invokes between writers and readers may also take the form of the writer's connection with herself. Kenneth Burke explains, "A man can be his own audience, insofar as he, even in his secret thoughts, cultivates certain ideas or images for the effect he hopes they may have upon him" (*RM* 38). The language and

images of internal thoughts have a persuasive "effect" on writers or speakers themselves, evoking specific emotional responses and connections within the speaker herself (Burke, *RM* 38). When Hopkins's speaker asks, "Márgarét, áre you gríeving/Over Goldengrove unleaving?" he presents an image of grief to himself, whether or not Margaret hears the question (G. Hopkins, "Spring" 1-2).

In this respect, we may view the speaker himself as also mourning. The speaker's subsequent reflections on the conditions of humanity, the universal human "heart" growing "older" and "colder," and "the blight man was born for" indicate that the speaker recognizes that significant losses (loss of innocence, loss of connections with others, loss of life itself) constitute human experience. As the speaker views Margaret as representing all humanity, he implicitly recognizes himself, as a member of humanity, in her grief as well. Insofar as the speaker identifies with Margaret's grief, he seems to adopt a similar attitude of mourning for the condition of humanity. When the speaker concludes that Margaret, like the rest of us, mourns ultimately for herself, he also seems to describe himself. The image of Margaret's grief that the speaker presents to himself allows the speaker to adopt a mournful attitude that mirrors Margaret's mourning. This attitude moves the speaker to reflect on the condition of humanity and its constituent losses (regardless of whether he actually voices these thoughts to Margaret herself or whether she understands them). He thus addresses and comes to terms with these losses, which are also in part his own, via the image of Margaret's grief.

The poem's images of grief may have had a similar effect on Hopkins himself. Since this poem was written during Hopkins's oppressive, de-moralizing stay in

Liverpool, it seems plausible that on some level, he may have written this poem in "hopes" that it would help him come to terms with his own sense of overwhelming loss (Burke, *RM* 38). In this sense, "Spring and Fall" may reflect Hopkins's response not only to the depressing atmosphere of Liverpool, but also to his persistent anxiety about whether or not spring—with the sense of renewal, beauty, hope, and growth it signified for Hopkins—would actually return each year. Through the poem's images, Hopkins may hope to reconcile the conflict between his childish fear that spring, hope, and renewal will not return and his adult knowledge that it will. In these respects, the poem's rhetoric may have helped Hopkins himself come to terms with the loss of inspiration and creativity that he felt in Liverpool and with the loss of his own peace of mind.

Like Hopkins, Frost too may have written "Nothing Gold Can Stay" in "hopes" that the poem's "images" might have consoling effects on him (Burke, *RM* 38). The images of springtime youth changing, moving towards death, may have been especially resonant for Frost when he drafted the initial fragment of the poem in 1900 when his young son passed away (Tuten and Zubizarreta xiv). Around the time Frost revised the poem in 1920, his sense of loss may have been heightened by the trials at Amherst, his ill health, and the news of his sister's declining mental health. The images of "Nothing Gold Can Stay" seem to have enduring appeal for Frost, who revived a discarded octet from drafts of "Nothing Gold Can Stay" in "It Is Almost the Year Two Thousand," published in 1942 (Parini 201; Pyle 175). By this time, Frost had lost a daughter to complications following childbirth, his wife to a severe heart attack, and his second son, Carol, to suicide (Parini 290, 310, 332). The persistent presence of loss in Frost's life

may well have contributed to the appeal he found in poetic images of loss. Loss and mourning must have been familiar feelings for Frost, and probable effects of "Nothing Gold Can Stay," as Sanders and Vogel recognize its "elegiac tone" and Ping and Reed trace the emotional descent that the poem effects as readers "slide from delight to sorrow" (Sanders and Vogel 240; Ping and Reed 119). Such an emotional effect may serve a purpose similar to the one that the *fort-da* game served for Freud's grandson: Perhaps such emotional effects help familiarize both internal and external audiences with grief and other emotional responses to loss. Familiarity, however, may do little to attenuate intense grief, and elegiac poems may at most provide opportunities for addressing grave losses that may seem to rupture one's very core and for finding order once again.

Frost and Hopkins both seem to defy their poems' emphases on loss by creating connections with reader. Hopkins's opening question also functions rhetorically in creating an emotional connection with his reader. Like Hopkins's speaker, and Margaret herself if the question is addressed to her explicitly, the reader is oriented toward Margaret's grief and thus toward Margaret. Like the speaker who seems to participate in Margaret's grief insofar as he recognizes it as such, Hopkins's reader may also indirectly participate in her grief by recognizing it. Like the speaker addresses the losses that constitute personhood, including his own, so too may Hopkins's reader orient herself toward loss by attending to the speaker's descriptions. As the reader confronts not only Margaret's grief for Goldengrove but also the speaker's grief for humanity and for himself, she may recognize herself as identified with both Margaret and the speaker

through their shared attitudes toward grief. This two-fold identification may give the reader an even stronger sense of connection than the speaker may experience insofar as he is only identified with Margaret. This sense of connection resists the themes of alienation and isolation, which scholars like Wardi and Slakey have emphasized. Although the speaker does question Margaret's—and humanity's—capacity to care about others, his doubts are expressed in language that evokes emotional connections between Margaret, the speaker, and Hopkins's reader. Connections between people are also emphasized by the question/answer format of the poem's dialogic structure. Since the genre of the poem implies an audience, the poem's structure implies its potential to connect to an audience, even as the content of the poem calls the possibility of such connections into question.

Dialogue is an integral component of Hopkins's poetry, suggests Donatella Abbate Badin in her essay "The Dialogic Structure of Hopkins' Poetry;" she emphasizes the "'internal dialogicity'" of Hopkins's poems "in that they are intrinsically a form of dialogue with their potential readers" (55). Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, Badin recognizes "Hopkins' dialogism" as "'utterances . . . oriented towards an anticipated implied response" (55). She thus clarifies that dialogue implies the possibility of response, whether or not that possibility is actualized. Badin's definition of Hopkins' dialogism affirms our readings of "Spring and Fall" as thoroughly dialogic, regardless of the ambiguity about whether or not the speaker actually speaks to Margaret. Badin's definition also affirms that the kinds of connection that the poem imagines between its characters and enables with its reader are not only relationships of

identification that may exist only in the mind's eye of the reader who recognizes them. Rather, the poem's connections imply possibilities of response—the possibility that Margaret may respond to the speaker, that the speaker may respond to himself, and that Hopkins' reader may respond to the poem. By thus preserving such possibilities for responsive connections, the dialogic nature of "Spring and Fall" seems to invoke connections that resist the speaker's doubts about humanity's capacity to care. Poetic dialogue becomes the format for addressing and even overcoming separation. Loss serves as the exigence for dialogue that explores and overcomes disconnection in "Spring and Fall." The poem seems to invoke connections in the face of their absence, as if the poem attempts to undo or reverse loss at an ontological level, even if it cannot undo the particular loss of Goldengrove's leaves.

Dialogue plays a much smaller role in Frost's "Nothing Gold Can Stay" as we previously observed in our discussion of the poems' two titles. Frost's speaker's seemingly impersonal voice in the poem identifies the speaker with Frost himself, deflecting his presence in the poem and thereby emphasizing the reader's presence. By making the reader "feel present" at the poem's events through short, simple descriptions of the landscape, Frost invites the reader to identify closely with the speaker's gaze—and, because the speaker is so closely identified with Frost, with Frost's gaze (Ping and Reed 115). The close identifications Frost invites between the speaker, the reader, and himself seem to occlude dialogue and separation, focusing the reader's attention on the connections that dialogue can yield rather than on the rhetorical, dialogic process of creating those connections. Although he does not illustrate dialogue as Hopkins's does,

Frost invites his reader to adopt an identifying gaze—to inhabit the role of an interlocutor in relationship to the poem itself, an effect that actualizes the reader's meaning-making capacity.

For example, the poem's synecdochal logic aims to identify the loss of spring's "early . . . flower" with the larger losses of autumn leaves, of dawn, and of Eden (Frost, "Nothing" 3). To be successful, however, these identifications must be recognized by the reader. By pointing to similarities between the images of nature's "early . . . flower" changing to leaf, "dawn" changing to "day," and Eden vanishing in "grief," Frost invites the reader to participate in the pattern-making process (3, 7, 6). In connecting the poem's images to each other, the reader shapes the poem's meaning in much the same way that the poet does, performing similar kinds of identifications and engaging with the poem dialogically from her rhetorical viewpoint. Derek Attridge explains how this kind of performance works in all literary texts when he notes that "literature does not present themes as such, but rather takes the reader through a process of thematizing," such that the reader is usually aware that in simply summarizing the theme of a literary work, she has "omitted everything that makes the work a literary artifact" (97). Because the reader participates in a text's processes, like "thematizing," her reading is "creative;" indeed, Attridge suggests all "literary reading" is "creative" (97, 95). Frost's reader reads creatively as she performs the identifications between the flower, dawn, and Eden that the poem invites. The reader's performance parallels the writer's processes of identifying different kinds of losses with each other, of recognizing synecdochal relationships, and

of negotiating specific rhyme and rhythm patterns—processes through which both Frost and his reader rhetorically shape the poem's meaning.

The reader may also respond dialogically and creatively to Frost's invitation to extend the meaning of the poem, in part by connecting it to her own personal experiences of loss. The final line, "Nothing gold can stay," aims to identify all losses with the ones Frost describes, seeming to project the synecdochal logic beyond the poem. Frost seems to invite his reader to imagine other instances that affirm the closing truism or proverb—and possibly even to defy the generalization by imagining instances that counter it. By engaging his reader in the poem's synecdochal logic and meaning-making patterns, Frost may invite his reader to pursue the poem's philosophical aim. As Frost's reader participates in the poem's poetic and philosophical processes, she actualizes her ability "*to be able*," her ability to make meaningful, personal relations (Levinas, "Time" 42). Because this capacity seems to allow one to act responsibly towards other people, the poem seems to actualize the reader's capacity for responsibility. In the following section, we will consider how the dialogues that Frost and Hopkins invite their readers to participate in align with Levinasian responsibility.

Rhetorical Dialogue as Ethical Responsibility

As we glimpsed with "Nothing Gold Can Stay," reading or writing poetry may actualize our ability "*to be able*," our capacity for responsibility in that readers participate in a creative act of realizing a text's singularity, as Derek Attridge describes (Levinas, "Time" 42). Attridge explains that creative reading "attempts to do justice to a work's singularity" in a Levinasian sense by participating in the processes of

"thematizing," allegorizing, identifying, etc. that characterize the text (Attridge 82, 96-97). Frost's reader affirms the singularity of his poem by, for example, participating in the poem's synecdochal relationships between flowers, leaves, dawn, and Eden, and participating in the poem's rhyme scheme. By participating in these processes, the reader responds to the text's "otherness," allowing her own "purposes" to be "reshaped by the work" such that her reading exceeds "conventionally determined meanings" and "is not entirely programmed by the work and the context in which it is read, including the psychological character of the reader" (Attridge 80). Creative reading involves attending to the ways in which a text's form may resist our expectations and assumptions, much as J. Hillis Miller encourages in "The Ethics of Reading." Such creative reading seems to actualize our ability "*to be able*" in part because it involves making sense of the text in light of its historical, political contexts and of one's own motives, expectations, and historical context. Creative reading—like writing—involves making meaning for oneself and sometimes for other readers. By thus creating personal meaning—by synthesizing words, contexts, various sources of meaning—a reader creates personal relationships not unlike the kind that, for Levinas "[vanquish] death" ("Time" 47).

This understanding of reading as actualizing our subjective ability "*to be able*" challenges Attridge's de-emphasis on a work's contexts, "including the psychological character of the reader" (Attridge 80). A work's various contexts—including its historical, political, and personal contexts—all influence a reader's ability to make sense of the work, to find personal meaning in a work. The singularity of a work's form is one element that facilitates a reader's—and a writer's—personal meaning-making processes.

Attridge seems to elide this personal significance when he focuses on a literary work's form—on its "referential properties" like "allegoricity . . . narrativity, metaphoricity . . . mimetivity" that contribute to the "*eventness*" or "*performance*" of a literary work" (96, 95). This treatment of form may not seem much different from New Criticism's investment in form. Take, for example, W. K. Wimsatt's treatment of rhyme in *The Verbal Icon*: "the emotions of poetry are simultaneous with conceptions and largely induced through the medium of conceptions . . . The words of rhyme . . . are an amalgam of the sensory and the logical, or an arrest and precipitation of the logical in sensory form; they are the icon in which the idea is caught" (165). For Wimsatt, poetic form embodies emotions and ideas, imposing logical order and "aesthetic value" onto their "alogical," unaesthetic character (165). Such arguments elide the personal, historical nature of emotions and ideas, and dismiss aesthetic value's contingency on the historical, personal, political, etc., contingencies that Pierre Bourdieu emphasizes in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*.

Attridge's and Wimsatt's emphases on form obscure the ethical, communal effects of literature on readers and writers. For example, both Attridge and Wimsatt risk diminishing human agency by projecting it onto literary form; Wimsatt claims, "The poem is an act," an abstraction suspended between a poet and audience, and Attridge similarly argues that literature is an "*event*" (Wimsatt xvii; Attridge 2). While these characterizations can be helpful for understanding how literature can rhetorically construct reality for writers and readers, Wimsatt's and Attridge's de-emphasis on literature's historical, psychological, and political contexts undermines the usefulness of

viewing literature as an act or event. Literature functions as an act or event *for* particular people, affecting their views and ways of making meaning in their psychological, historical, and political contexts. Even Sacks's description of the elegy as "a *work*," as in "the working through of an impulse or experience," may risk obscuring literature's rhetorical, ethical significance for readers who lose sight of the fact that elegies serve as works of mourning for particular people, for human agents, who encounter loss in particular historical moments (1).

By emphasizing literature's form over its historical and political contexts, Attridge obscures some of the rhetorical—and ethical—effects of literature. Based on literature's formal "difference from other kinds of writing," Attridge concludes that literature "solves no problems and saves no souls" (4). Yet readers of elegiac poetry, such as Susan Hess, argue otherwise; Hess, a victim of childhood abuse, explains that Emily Dickinson all but saved her soul as Dickinson's poems "leapt from the page to meet [her] mental and emotional needs and transformed" her, giving her "a path to freedom" (63). Because Attridge dismisses "the psychological character of the reader" and other personal, historical, and political contexts of literature, he obscures the ethical effects that literature rhetorically evokes (80).

Literary texts can rhetorically mediate ethical relationships between writers and readers—and among communities of readers. The language and form of a poem, for example, is the common ground between the writer and all of her readers. Because the poem's form may serve as the impetus for connections between people—the writer and her readers—we have a responsibility to attend carefully to the poem's singular form as a

way of caring for the common ground through which we may connect with other people. Responding responsibly to the poem's form is an indirect way of acting responsibly towards the community of readers—including the writer herself—that the poem invokes. Attridge obscures this rhetorical function of literature when he equates our responsibility to and for a text with our responsibility to and for a person. He explains that our responsibilities to texts and to people are also similar in that both entail "a responsible openness to the other," a responsibility equally expressed "as I compose music or respond to another person or read a novel" (Attridge 127). By listing a response to another person among aesthetic activities like "compos[ing] music" and "read[ing] a novel," Attridge suggests that all of these actions are ethical in parallel ways—because they are equally encounters with otherness and therefore they all equally summon my responsibility (127). Our responsibilities to text and to people, however, are not separate but equal responsibilities. Rather, our responsibility for other people in a Levinasian sense is primary and motivates our secondary responsibility for texts.

When a reader makes sense of a poem, creating personal meaning, by attending responsibly to the poem's form, then the reader's care for the poem is an indirect way of caring for the community of other readers that the poem makes possible and with whom she may be indirectly connected. These community-affirming effects of poetry do not define, as Attridge does, literature as a distinct genre, but rather align literature and poetry on a continuum of rhetorical forms of communication. Poetry can affirm communities with others in much the same way that memorials do, as we have seen in the comparison of Hopkins's poem with the commemorations of the Columbine tragedy.

To recognize Levinas's ethical responsibility in the acts of reading and writing seems to require also recognizing how these acts involve not just literary forms, but human agents. For example, Levinas explains, "Responsibility, in the etymological sense of the term . . . is what is meant by *dialogue* . . ." ("Martin Buber" 66-67) Hopkins portrayals of emotional, dialogic connections, when we read them in light of Levinas's theory of responsibility, seem to align meta-poetically dialogue with ethical responsibility. The dialogic effects of Hopkins's rhetoric allow us to recognize emotional connections not only between Margaret and the speaker, but also between both characters and ourselves. These dialogic connections are appealing because they seem to overcome or at least coincide with the loss and separation that Hopkins explicitly describes. Through this meta-poetic appeal, Hopkins seems to argue that dialogue is an ethical response to loss. By suggesting that dialogue is ethical, Hopkins seems to support Levinas's identification of dialogue with ethical responsibility.

The implicit way that Hopkins evokes dialogue in "Spring and Fall" seems to parallel the implicit nature of Levinasian responsibility—a capacity for relating to others that underlies, precedes, makes possible all of our narcissistic tendencies. For Levinas, responsibility is the primary capacity of the human subject, a capacity that makes possible "the affective as such," creates the possibility for emotion under girded by one's fear for her own death ("Dying For" 216). Responsibility, Levinas emphasizes, is prior to all intention and conscious action; it "goes against intentionality, such that responsibility for others could never mean altruistic will, instinct of 'natural benevolence,' or love" because I am responsible prior to my ability to intend, to act intentionally, or even to

care ("Substitution" 99, 101). Hopkins likewise hints that dialogic relations may underlie our conscious, emotional experiences. For example, the narrator does not seem to recognize consciously that he may be connected to Margaret through their shared attitudes of grief; Hopkins leaves it to his reader to recognize the possibility of identifying the narrator and Margaret. Hopkins's indirect, implicit means of evoking dialogic relations seems to echo Levinas's argument that our capacity for responsibility underlies our conscious thoughts and emotions.

Levinas helps us recognize that Hopkins's dialogic effects describe the ethical nature of personhood, albeit in terms that are not overtly religious. Hopkins seems to agree with Levinas that personhood centers on loss, although he seems to fall short of affirming responsibility as the defining mark of personhood. Hopkins treats mourning itself synecdochally, as if mourning reflects the essential "blight" of humankind—separation through mortality and narcissism (14). In this respect, for Hopkins mourning illustrates that personhood is defined by separation and loss. Mourning also seems to be an attitude essential to personhood for Levinas, for whom "mourning . . . functions . . . as an internal rhetoric of his discourse as well as a sign of rhetorical imperatives denoting and inflecting his description of ethics" (Spargo, *Vigilant Memory* 32). Mourning, for Levinas, implies one's ethical attitude toward the potential injustice in the other's death, and therefore mourning expresses the essentially ethical nature of personhood. Although mourning illustrates how personhood is constituted by responses to loss and injustice for both Levinas and Hopkins, the ethical nature of that loss may be more strongly Christian for Hopkins, since in the Judeo-Christian tradition, mortality and separation were

invoked through humankind's fall from grace to which Goldengrove seems to allude. Levinas, on the other hand, does not tie the subject's responsibility to the other directly to humankind's fall from grace.

Together, Hopkins and Levinas demonstrate how Burke's description of identification functions on an ethical level. Burke observes that two people who are identified with each other "are both joined and separate, at once distinct substance[s] and consubstantial with one another" (*RM* 21). For Levinas, because we are separate from the other and therefore risk lethally harming her, we are born into responsibility for her. A person's separation from the other compels the responsibility that binds her to the other and, in doing so, gives rise to her personhood. Hopkins demonstrates how dialogue can create emotional connections that coexist with separation; although the narrator and Margaret do not seem to connect to each other directly in the poem, their shared attitudes of grief provide a common ground by which the reader may identify them. Such fundamental, rhetorical connections, motivated by loss and separation, seem essential to both Hopkins's and Levinas's definitions of personhood.

Conclusion

Projections of loss—and death—onto nature in these lyrics are the same kind of projection that creates personhood in Doss's example of the Columbine shooting. For example, Zanis, the carpenter, seems to have, in a sense, projected personhood onto the killers by including them in his memorial for all those who had died, acknowledging them as members of a his own human community through his act of responsibility that recognizes their otherness. Such projection may also convey personhood to mourners

like Zanis, Margaret, and Frost's speaker, as Levinas suggests. Frost's speaker and Margaret seem to create their own personhood in the process of projecting it onto nature, organizing their sense of self even in the act of projection, which may also be an act that distances them from their own self-hoods. Perhaps Margaret's and Frost's speaker's projections cast too wide a net for personhood as they verge on personifying nature and thereby threaten its singularity. On the other hand, their poems may convey their creative responses to nature in Attridge's sense—their poems may affirm some of nature's singularities, like the specific leaves that die in Hopkins's poem. These contrasting ethical possibilities may coexist, confronting readers with ambiguity.

Such ambiguity may exist between carpenter Greg Zanis's inclusive memorial of the Columbine tragedy and Brian Rohrbough's divisive response that excluded the killers. Zanis's response aims to affirm connection with other people. His act of memorializing the killers implies that he felt responsible for preserving connection even in the face of the division and loss that the killers perpetrated. On the other hand, Rohrbough felt compelled to cut off the killers from the community and its public memorials even after their deaths, suggesting that he found the idea or memory of the killers dangerous and threatening to the community. These opposite responses to the killers' deaths present us with ambiguity not unlike the implications of Frost's and Hopkins's poems for ethics. Although the Columbine mourners responded differently to tragic loss, their methods of mourning imply their attitudes about what does and does not count as a valuable life and thereby rhetorically shape their communities and their own identities. Like Margaret and Frost's speaker, these mourners may have constructed

versions of their own personhoods through their responses to the lives lost at Columbine. The ambiguity that surrounds these real and poetic responses to loss may reveal our epistemological limit. Such ambiguity suggests that ethical certainty about such situations is enigmatic, if not altogether elusive. By confronting us with the loss of certainty and knowledge, such ambiguity may thereby impinge on our ability "*to be able*," confronting us, however indirectly, with our own deaths (Levinas, "Time" 42). Levinas, Hopkins, Frost, and Burke all affirm the preservation of dialogue as a vital way of responding to such loss.

CHAPTER III

THE MANY FACES OF LOSS

Epideictic Poetry in Our Day

Less than one month after 9/11, Dinitia Smith of The New York Times writes, "In the weeks since the terrorist attacks, people have been consoling themselves—and one another—with poetry in an almost unprecedented way," a claim supported by her descriptions of the many of poems and verses accompanying photos of victims at Ground Zero, in makeshift memorials all around New York City, and even in emails among friends and family. According to Ellen Louise Hart, Emily Dickinson's lyric that begins "After great pain, a formal feeling comes—" repeatedly served as a source for post-9/11 consolation: Cartoonist Lynda Barry drew her September comic strip around Dickinson's lyric, and, for its fall 2001 advisory publication, the Dickinson Homestead included the same poem accompanied by a note to readers conveying its "hope that Dickinson's poems speak to you in your efforts to cope, to remember, to recover" in the wake of September 11th (71-72). Such communal reliance on poetry during times of mourning is not new. Jeffrey Walker indicates that poetry and epigrams mediated public responses to loss even in ancient Hellenic culture. In his *Rhetoric and Poetry in Antiquity*, Walker explains how epigrammatic poetry on Attic and Spartan graves appeals to an audience's common knowledge that "the mortality of human beings is pitiable"—a public appeal that serves as a "means of reaffirming . . . an audience's value-hierarchies and its sense of self-identity" (253, 255). Such affirmation may be a source

of consolation in the face of death—yet, as Walker emphasizes, it is also a kind of epideictic argument.

For Walker, epideictic discourse, whether prose or verse, "cultivates the basic codes of value and belief by which a society or culture lives" and "shapes . . . the 'deep' commitments and presuppositions" that produce and affirm community (9). His definition is based in part on Aristotle's definition of epideictic discourse as a rhetorical genre that focuses on praise and blame, targets an audience of "observer[s]," not judges, and is more concerned with "the present" than with the past or the future (Aristotle, *On Rhetoric* 48). In antiquity, epideictic rhetoric differed from pragmatic genres like forensic and deliberative rhetoric because epideictic discourse, a more "amorphous" genre, was "performed at festivals and ceremonial or symposiastic occasions"—i.e. public, communal events (Walker 7). Such events were characterized by poetic discourses that were "rhythmically structured, tropologically figured . . . chanted, or sung with stylized intonation and/or gestures," and that demonstrated "equivalent . . . phrases of similar length and structure" (Walker 11). These poetic qualities contributed to epideictic's "felt 'presence' and memorability" (Walker 11). Indeed Walker argues that "what comes to be called the art of rhetoric . . . in fact originates . . . from an expansion of the poetic/epideictic realm" (18). In fact, the Greek word *poiêsis* preceded *rhêtorikê*: The term "*poiêsis*," connoting "doing" or "making" emerged from "*aoidê*," meaning "song," in the fifth century B.C., whereas the terms "*rhêtor*" and "*technê rhêtorikê*" did not arise until "the late fifth and early fourth centuries B.C." (Walker 19, 26).

Epideictic is both poetic and ceremonial. George A. Kennedy explains that, in Aristotle's day, epideictic speech belonged to ceremonious events like funerals, and thus this category "needs to be generalized to include the rituals, performances, and occasional rhetoric found in cultures all over the world," especially "lyric poetry in the form of odes and sonnets celebrating an occasion . . ." (88). Epideictic's "occasional" quality lends this genre an inherent exigence, making epideictic an essentially responsive genre in that it by definition responds to an occasion, event, or ceremony. This exigence also gives poetic epideictic a rhetorical purpose of "increase[ing] adherence to an accepted value" (Kennedy 88). Because epideictic rhetoric responds to a specific occasion or event by affirming "value," it seems like a very natural kind of rhetorical response to events like 9/11. The elegy itself is a genre that likewise has an inherent exigence since it by definition responds to loss. Writers and readers of both elegiac poetry and epideictic rhetoric are thus positioned by the genre they engage with as respondents (more so than as arguers or as instigators, although they may well inhabit these positions too). In light of this historical context, we may view Americans' public, poetic responses to the 9/11 catastrophe as functioning epideictically and elegiacally, not unlike the epideictic uses of poetry in antiquity.

To view modern poems like Dickinson's "After great pain," Frost's "Desert Places," and Richard Wilbur's "Boy at the Window" as full-fledged epideictic rhetoric, however, is to qualify Walker's final claims about the "limited" degree of contemporary poetry's rhetorical nature (329). Walker traces the history of contemporary poetry to the grammatical tradition rooted in late antiquity, promoted by figures like Augustine and

Sidney, and extended through the Enlightenment (311, 329). This grammatical tradition divorces both poetry and rhetoric "from notions of argumentation or 'reason,'" diminishing poetry to mere mimetic expression and rhetoric to style (Walker 329). In the wake of this tradition, Walker finds the rhetoric of contemporary poetry lacking a "capacity for speaking across boundaries *persuasively* or for mounting a culturally significant epideictic eloquence that does more than simply reconfirm the group's existing pieties and hierarchies of value" (330). Although Walker recognizes this community-affirming effect of contemporary poetry as merely "a minor kind of epideictic," this "minor" effect seems invaluable to writers and readers mourning personal and communal losses like 9/11 (330). The book in which Ellen Louise Hart's essay appears, *Wider than the Sky: Essays and Meditations on the Healing Power of Emily Dickinson*, includes sundry scholarly essays, personal narratives, and short meditations written by diverse Dickinson readers, all of whom have found consolation in her poetry when faced with various kinds of loss and trauma. These responses affirm that Dickinson's poems appeal to—and persuade—readers across vast boundaries of time and personal experience. This kind of epideictic persuasion seems especially valuable in situations of loss.

The popularity of Dickinson's short lyrics, which are widely anthologized, affirms the broad appeal of such anthology pieces, including Robert Frost's and Richard Wilbur's poems. Dickinson's lyric "After great pain, a formal feeling comes" complements elegiac images in Frost's "Desert Places." The wintry images in Wilbur's "Boy at the Window" echoes the winter landscape in Frost's poem and the sense of

frozen emotion that Dickinson's poem. Frost's and Dickinson's speakers both respond to loss—especially the loss of their own emotions and even their own subjectivities—but emphasize different facets of those experiences. Although both speakers suffer from paralyzing, death-like absences of affect, Dickinson's speaker emphasizes a fragmented subjectivity while Frost's speaker emphasizes the specific loss of the ability to express himself. By reading these poems together, we may better recognize how integrally these two facets of subjectivity (emotion and expression) are related. These poems share similar rhetorical images of wintry scenes, frozen emptiness, disconnection, paralysis, and death. Wilbur echoes these images, but uses them to emphasize not an absence of emotion, but rather the boy's overwhelming grief. Frost's, Dickinson's, and Wilbur's poems affirm Emmanuel Levinas's view that loss lies at the heart of human experience—but each poem emphasizes different aspects of that experience. These rhetorical, persuasive dynamics of their lyrics affirm both that contemporary poetry may appeal across vast boundaries of time and personal experience and that such epideictic persuasion may be especially valuable to readers coping with loss.

Ethics as Elegiac Subjectivity

This chapter explores how Dickinson and Frost rhetorically evoke mournful responses in their readers, and thereby affirm personal relations threatened by loss and death. Emotion is conspicuously absent in both poems, however, as each speaker expresses a death-like experience of losing of his or her own subjectivity. Although both Dickinson and Frost personify non-human elements of their surroundings to emphasize their speakers' loss of personhood, their poetic expressions invoke the kinds of personal

relations that, for Levinas, "[vanquish] death" ("Time" 47). In contrast to Dickinson's and Frost's representations of the absence of affect that accompanies the loss of one's very personhood, Richard Wilbur portrays an overwhelming presence of emotion and personhood as a response to threatened subjectivity in "Boy at the Window" (hereafter "Boy"). Personification saturates Wilbur's poem, which draws attention to the ways in which the boy, Wilbur, and the reader all participate in personifying acts—acts on which the very presence of human subjectivity depends. Wilbur's images of intense emotion may border on the sentimental, but, in doing so, may serve elegiac purposes. By contrasting the presence of affect and personhood in Wilbur's poem with the absence of both in Dickinson's and Frost's lyrics, we may identify two dichotomous effects of losing one's subjectivity (at least imaginatively or psychologically, if not literally). Such poems in turn may function epideictically by helping readers find terms for their own experiences of loss, much as the writers in *Wider than the Sky* identified with Dickinson's poetic portrayals of mourning. Together, Dickinson's, Frost's, and Wilbur's poems suggest that human mourning can include even seemingly dichotomous ways of grieving, thereby validating non-stereotypical forms of mourning and expanding the possibilities for who may be recognized as legitimate mourners.

These dichotomous responses to loss may reflect a generic contrast between the elegy and what we might call an anti-elegy after the "anti-elegiac principle" that Eleanor DesPrez recognizes in Frost's poetry (34). DesPrez registers Frost's un-affective voice as an ethical and aesthetic critique of the elegy's sentimentality. Such a generic contrast between the elegy and the anti-elegy, however, exposes the many kinds of responses that

loss can inspire. Indeed the many faces of loss include both the unbearable presence and the unbearable absence of affect. Yet these diverse responses to loss all affirm that dialogue (the presence of a listener or reader) is the healing end for which elegiac/poetic loss aims. Such an aim affirms the elegy's epideictic function and the healing power of poetic dialogue.

Based on the affective contrasts between Dickinson, Frost, and Wilbur, I conclude that poetic or elegiac attitudes of loss may be expressed in various—even opposite—ways. When we recognize the many faces or expressions of loss, we may more readily respond to those expressions with sympathetic patience, with compassionate attention to how the Other's loss compels us to respond. Emmanuel Levinas suggests that loss is inherent in ethical, humane subjectivity. To exist as a human subject, "One has to speak, to say *I*," but such expression always already implies the Other's listening presence ("Ethics" 82). This Other, however, is vulnerable, mortal—vulnerable to me and to my possible indifference (whether intentional or unintentional) to her mortality. The Other's mortality thus implicates my responsibility to attend to her vulnerability, to make sure that I do not usurp resources essential to her survival ("Ethics" 82). Levinas explains, "my being-in-the-world" always risks being "the usurpation of spaces belonging to the other man whom I have already oppressed or starved, or driven out into a third world . . ." ("Ethics" 82). In this sense, "to say *I*"—to be present as human—is to always already be responsible to and for the Other, who I may lethally displace ("Ethics" 82). Responsibility for the Other precedes and invokes my very presence as a person, "as if I had to answer for the other's death even before

being" ("Ethics" 83). The Other's mortality and vulnerability—her potential to lose life and/or the necessities that sustain it—compel me, before my very presence as human, to respond, to take responsibility for preserving her personhood.

I suggest that all our responses, and especially our mournful responses, to others may signify or express this underlying ethical relationship. In *Vigilant Memory: Emmanuel Levinas, the Holocaust, and the Unjust Death*, R. Clifton Spargo explains "that for Levinas mourning is a discursive mode referring to an excess in all remembrance, to an exteriority that arises as greater than any historiographical or cultural ordering of our knowledge, and yet it is not reducible to the priority of the private, parochial, or simply communal interest" (34). Mournful emotion exceeds the self, not in a merely "communal" sense, but in a specifically ethical sense on which, for Levinas, community is predicated (Spargo, *Vigilant Memory* 34). In mourning for a particular loss, the mourner does not come to possess the lost object or person because the reality of the loss always already defies that possession; as Spargo concludes "as an attitude without consent, mourning characterizes a speaker who has forever lost the content of what she would speak" (*Vigilant Memory* 34). Because it resists reality, mourning can never fully reduce the other to an object, theme, or content to be possessed through description—rather the other's alterity perseveres in resistance to the mourner, whose mournful attitude necessarily remains oriented, responsive towards the other's alterity (Spargo, *Vigilant Memory* 34). As Spargo explains, "mournful memory, in responding to the death of another, is necessarily dedicated to an alterity" (*Vigilant Memory* 47).

I suggest that while mourning for the other's death may always imply a recognition of the other's alterity (if only the alterity of the other's death), our expressions and actions may realize this ethical valence to greater or lesser degrees. Richard Wilbur's illustration of such mourning for the other's death in "Boy at the Window" contrasts the boy's mourning, which is directed more toward himself than toward the snowman, with the snowman's mourning, which seems more ethical in a Levinasian sense. This ethical structure of mourning, which may inhere in many kinds of expressions of loss, lies at the heart of all ethical relations for Levinas, for whom "mournfulness . . . inflects and inspires ethics" even prior to our conscious intentions, motives, and emotions (Spargo, *Vigilant Memory* 47). The "impossible responsibility" that constitutes such mournful, ethical relations may even inhere in the very structure of "language itself," as Spargo suggests (*Vigilant Memory* 36). This chapter, "The Many Faces of Loss," argues that Levinas's ethical responsibility illuminates all our expressions of mourning, and anticipates the next chapter's exploration of how such mournful responsibility, especially when it is expressed poetically, may lead to responsible, dialogic consolation.

Personal Rhetorics in Poetry of Loss

The epideictic appeals and elegiac ethics of Dickinson's "After great pain" and Frost's "Desert Places" become clearer when we contextualize Dickinson's and Frost's poetry historically and biographically. Both poems are informed by personal and cultural contexts of loss and hardship—contexts that resonate with Levinas's ethical concerns about what it means to die and to lose one's human subjectivity. Emily Dickinson's lyric

was written around 1862 during the Civil War (Ferguson, Salter, and Stallworthy 1015). About this time, Dickinson supposedly "experienced a psychic catastrophe" that "haunted" her with "some mysterious fright" and thus inspired her poetry (Manley 260). Francis Manley situates "After great pain" within a group of about twenty-five to thirty poems that all address "the intense subtleties of mental anguish" (260). Although "After great pain" was not published until 1929, it's not hard to imagine that Dickinson's poetic response to personal pain would likely appeal as much to Americans plagued by the Great Depression as it would to readers of her own war-torn era (Ferguson, Salter, and Stallworthy 1015). Indeed Ellen Louise Hart affirms the appeal of "After great pain" to Americans mourning after 9/11, and her essay is one of many in *Wider than the Sky* that further affirms that Dickinson's poetry in general continues to console diverse readers grieving over various personal losses.

Frost's "Desert Places" appeared in print at the time of the Great Depression, and also during one of several periods of ill health in Frost's life (Parini 285). Although he was too ill to fulfill many of his professional commitments at the end of 1933, he wrote "Desert Places" in the early 1930s (Parini 285). It was first published in April 1934 in the literary journal *American Mercury*, and it was later included in his collection of poems *A Further Range* published in 1936 (Barron 73). Haunted by the deaths of his father during his childhood, of his 3-year-old son in 1900, and of his mentally unstable sister in 1929, Frost clearly seems to be one well acquainted with the darkness of loss by the time he writes "Desert Places" (Parini 18, 68, 199). This poem, like Dickinson's lyric, continues to speak to readers from its place in anthologies, which indicates that the

literary community recognizes some enduring appeal in these poems. When we read these poems side by side, both seem to reach out to readers across time and personal singularities, inviting readers to see themselves as members of a human community constituted in part by the universal presences of loss, absence, and death.

Rhetorical and Poetic Values of Death

Levinas's theory that death signifies the absolute absence of meaning helps us recognize Dickinson's and Frost's suggestions that the emotional responses that death evokes, particularly grief, are themselves meaningful, valuable. As the presence of absence overwhelms Robert Frost's "Desert Places" and Emily Dickinson's "After great pain," the speakers of both poems dwell upon losses of connections with others and with themselves. Mourning in these poems, however, seems to resonate not so much in the speakers, who express "formal feeling[s]" of emptiness and alienation, as in the reader, who grieves the absences of affect in the speakers' expressions (Dickinson, "After" line 1). This mournful effect emphasizes the value of emotion in the face of such losses of connection, losses that may at least subtly signify our own impending deaths. Emotion, including emotional emptiness, helps deflect the threat to meaning that death implies by inspiring poetry. Perhaps such poetic and rhetorical means of mourning heal us by reminding us of our ability to make meaning even when meaning itself seems utterly lost. Such creative processes may be part of "[v]anquishing death" itself, which, for Levinas, seems to entail affirming the value of "personal" relationships, the value of humanity itself, in the face of personal loss ("Time" 47).

For Levinas, the problem of loss defines the ethical foundation of subjectivity, prior to any ontological question of being or presence. Death—as the loss of our own lives, but, more importantly, as the loss of the other's life—is a threshold or defining mark of human subjectivity in Levinas's ethics. My own death implies the inherently relational nature of human subjectivity since, as Levinas explains, in death "the subject loses its very mastery as a subject"—its very ability "to grasp," its "initiative" and "mastery" that constitutes being as human "subject" ("Time" 40-41, 47, 42). Death ruptures my very relation to my own subjectivity, and thus leaves me with no agency, no way of making meaning. This rupturing of my self-relation, however, only follows from my responsibility for the Other's death, a responsibility that is, for Levinas, the ethical origin of my subjectivity. My very humanity emerges only as "[t]he other man's death calls me into question, as if . . . I had become the accomplice of the death to which the other . . . is exposed;" only in this relationship to the other am I implicated as responsible and thus human ("Ethics" 83). Although as Spargo explains "[f]or Levinas an injustice inheres, at least potentially, in every death"—mine and the other's—my humanity resides in my responsibility towards the injustice of the other's death (*Vigilant Memory* 64). According to Levinas's definition of subjectivity, "[t]he human is the return to the interiority of non-intentional consciousness . . . to its capacity to fear injustice more than death, to prefer to suffer than to commit injustice, and to prefer what justifies being over that which assures it" ("Ethics" 85).

The injustice of my death follows from this injustice of the other's death because my death renders me incapable of responding to the other, unable to maintain a just,

"personal relationship" with the other (Levinas, "Time" 47). Levinas claims, "Vanquishing death is to maintain, with the alterity of the event, a relationship that must still be personal" ("Time" 47). Levinas recognizes this kind of enduring "personal relationship" in a verse from II Samuel that describes how "Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided . . ." ("Time" 47; II Sam. 1:23 qtd. in "Dying For . . ." 215). In their acts of "dying for the other," this father and son portray "the very meaning of love in its responsibility for one's fellow man," "as if . . . in death all relationship to the other person were not undone" ("Dying For . . ." 216, 215). Spargo explains, "Saul and Jonathan live only in the meaning of their dedication to each other," which "gives meaning to their humanity precisely in this 'worry over the death of the other . . . before care for self'" (*Vigilant Memory* 47; Levinas qtd. in Spargo, *Vigilant Memory* 47). In dying for each other, Saul and Jonathan express their responsibility for each other even in the event of death, which renders us incapable of acting on this responsibility. Through their mutual self-sacrifice, Saul and Jonathan sustain their relationship beyond the incapacities that death invokes.

When one loses oneself in responsibility for the other, the loss justifies one's presence and thereby invokes one's humanity. To give oneself over to the other in this way, however, is an act predicated on our human ability "*to be able*" (Levinas, "Time" 42). Sacrifice turns the loss of this agency into an expression of that agency itself. In Dickinson's "After great pain" and in Frost's "Desert Places," both speakers express fears that their human agency is in peril if not already lost. Through writing poetry, they aim to actualize their fading agency in ways that sustain "personal relationship[s]" with

readers and with themselves (Levinas, "Time" 47). Together Levinas, Dickinson, and Frost help us recognize how death haunts presence, which is always already constituted in part by inevitable absence and loss ("Time" 41). When we understand experience in terms of loss, we may more readily recognize ambiguity—and vulnerability—at the heart of human presence.

Absences of Affect

Although neither Robert Frost nor Emily Dickinson directly address death in these two poems, the presence of absence does overwhelm both "Desert Places" and "After great pain." Frost's speaker shares a haunting memory of a dark, snowy "field" he once "looked into going past" ("Desert Places" 2). He seems to project his own overwhelming loneliness onto this snowy landscape, claiming he is "too absent-spirited to count" (Frost, "Desert Places" 7). The speaker is thus absent from the landscape, which, itself a mere memory, is also in a sense absent. In addition, the speaker is absent to himself, apparently only recognizing his own fear in the final stanza as he admits that he is terrified of the blank, empty "desert places" within himself (Frost, "Desert Places" 16). Emily Dickinson's speaker is similarly absent in her lyric as she focuses on a liminal, "formal feeling" that follows "great pain" and precedes "the letting go" ("After" 1, 13). Dickinson's depersonalized "formal feeling" that could belong to "everyone," as Mordecai Marcus notes, or "to no one" as Francis Manley claims, or to anyone (Dickinson 1; Marcus 16; Manley 261).[8] This stone-like "Quartz contentment" seems,

8. With no account of the causes of the speaker's pain, and with the impersonal terminology of "[t]he Nerves," [t]he Heart," and "[t]he Feet, the speaker's "individuality" thus "counts for little" (Marcus 16-17).

paradoxically, to be a weighty emptiness, an intense emotion that lacks substance—much like the "blanker whiteness of" the increasing loneliness that Frost's speaker recognizes in nature, but barely acknowledges in himself (Dickinson 9). Both Dickinson's and Frost's speakers express an absence of connection with other people and their surroundings, an absence of emotion itself, and an absence of connection with themselves.

These absences are conveyed and indeed constituted in part by each poet's rhetorical uses of personification. Although both authors use rhetorical devices to diminish their speakers' presences in the poems, Dickinson and Frost differ in the values they place on emotion in these poems. Dickinson's speaker conveys fear of losing emotion itself, while Frost's speaker emphasizes fear of losing the ability to express himself, an ability that seems to depend in part on one's emotions, on the presence of affect. These speakers both demonstrate attitudes toward loss and absence that make elegiac appeals to readers, inviting mournful responses from them. The speakers' own absences of emotion and of connection with themselves invite emotional responses in the reader, which in turn become a common ground of connection between speaker and implied reader, between author and historical reader. The presence of these rhetorical connections not only offers an opportunity for mourning, but also seems to deflect, at least momentarily, each speaker's fears of an ultimate loss of meaningful relations—which, for Levinas, is the essential horror of death.

Levinas's Ethical Affect

Mourning itself has an inherently ethical nature, according to Spargo's account of Levinasian ethics. Spargo explains "the basic ethical structure of grief" as the "[desire] to preserve what it cannot possibly preserve" (*Vigilant Memory* 52). This definition positions grief as the emotional effect of resistance to our desire to preserve. Grief mirrors the fundamental, ethical relationship of my responsibility for the other's death—an "impossible responsibility" to preserve her presence in the face of the reality at which I will ultimately fail, for the other's death, like my own, is inevitable whether I am present or not (Spargo, *Vigilant Memory* 36). What matters is that, in my proximity to the other, I always risk invoking her inevitable death, and thus I am ethically responsible for preserving her presence against the threat I pose. Mourning implicitly affirms this ethical relationship in that "the mourner . . . remains a witness to an absence entirely predicated upon, yet also interpreting, the priority of relationship" itself, which, for Levinas, is always under girded by our ethical responsibility (Spargo, *Vigilant Memory* 52). This ethical mourning functions as the ground of affective experience because "the death of the other prompts an affective movement in the self underlying all responsiveness" (Spargo, *Vigilant Memory* 58). The mournful dimension of our responsible relationship to the other may thus underlie not only the mournful responses that Dickinson and Frost evoke in their readers, but also the absences of affect in their speakers' responses to loss. I suggest that all of our emotional responses to others that we consciously experience are inflected by this emphasis on relation in ethical mourning.

Spargo concludes that "the death of the other prompts an affective movement in the self underlying all responsiveness" (*Vigilant Memory* 58). Dickinson and Frost show us that such "responsiveness" can in fact include even the absence of affect. This "affective movement" evoked by "the death of the other" precedes the self's motives, intentions, and conscious emotions related to "experiential existence;" as Spargo explains, "our emotional relation to the death of the other describes a state of receptivity far surpassing the self's capability in the world" (*Vigilant Memory* 58). Indeed this emotional relation may well be non-affective in and of itself. Spargo explains that "the affect inspired by the other's death prompts a movement in self," a "movement within identity [that] is structured according to a crucial rupture in identity . . . dislocating the coherence of identity" itself (*Vigilant Memory* 57). This emotional response is not characterized by some affective content or expression of grief (i.e. weeping), but rather by its "ruptur[ing]" effect on the subject herself (Spargo, *Vigilant Memory* 57). We may view Dickinson's and Frost's speaker's imperiled, incoherent identities as signifying this kind of ethically ruptured, fragmented subjectivity. Such incoherence seems to define human subjectivity for Levinas, who associates "an emotional relation toe the death of the other" with the ethical "responsibility for him in the unknown" (Levinas qtd. in Spargo, *Vigilant Memory* 57). Spargo infers that, by "dislocating the coherence of identity, the emotional response articulates the subject as that which has been questioned by the event of death" (*Vigilant Memory* 57). Spargo's Levinas portrays human subjectivity precisely as a mode of presence that has been affected—ruptured, dislocated, scarred—by the other's death.

Human subjectivity is thus effected by a relation to the other that disrupts the self, as if subjectivity is fundamentally fragmented, at least at some deep level. This ruptured nature of subjectivity, however, continues to affirm subjectivity's relational essence. Levinas's theory allows us to see Frost's and Dickinson's implications about the affective, relational aspect of subjectivity more explicitly. In light of Levinas's emphasis on the ethical contours of grief, Frost's and Dickinson's mournful effects on readers are essentially ethical. By affirming the priority of relationship," mourning mirrors the relational essence of Levinasian responsibility (Spargo, *Vigilant Memory* 52). To the extent that mourning constitutes the affective form of subjectivity's nature, Frost and Dickinson evoke a humanizing response in their readers, inviting them to experience on a conscious level the attitude toward loss implicit in our being. And even if their readers have different affective responses to their poems, Dickinson and Frost still succeed in evoking a response from—and "personal" relations with—others that affirm their speakers' human presences.

The Ambiguity of Personal Presence

In his comparison of Emily Dickinson's lyric 341 with Frost's poem "Acquainted with the Night," Mordecai Marcus suggests that both authors depersonalize emotions by describing them in "universal terms"—terms that undermine the "individuality" and presence of the poems' respective speakers (17). According to Marcus, Dickinson specifically emphasizes "universal experiences" of "Great pain" by describing this emotion as an impersonal "Hour of Lead" (16). She also depersonalizes specific body parts like "Nerves" and "Feet" by referring to them only categorically as "*The* Nerves"

and "*The* Feet," not personally as would be signified in "my feet" or even "her feet" (Marcus 16; emphasis mine).[9] This depersonalization of body parts, however, allows Dickinson to grant these "Nerves" and this "Heart" an unexpected kind of personhood. Through personification, "The Nerves" assume personalities akin to mourners, as Francis Manley observes, "sitt[ing] ceremonious[ly]" around "the body or 'the stiff Heart'" (Dickinson 2-3). In this personification, the "Nerves" and the "Heart" that "questions" represent synecdochally the speaker herself, while simultaneously insinuating a community of mourners (Dickinson, "After" 2-3). Insofar as the speaker represents herself through synecdoche and personification, she conveys distance and disconnection from herself—from her own body and emotions. Her fragmented sense of self suggests that she lacks a unifying subjectivity. Such fragmentation, though, may be a fundamental effect of the other's death that gives rise to the self's ethical subjectivity.

The speaker never acknowledges her own feelings of emptiness, but rather apparently feels so alienated, even from herself, that she can only convey her emotional absence by describing it indirectly through her personification of depersonalized body parts. This paradox signifies the speaker's absence by representing a fragmented body where there should instead be a coherent self. This self-less body underscores the speaker's utter isolation both from others and from herself, conveying a sense of despair

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9. For Marcus, these terms convey the speaker's "defensive . . . detachment from a world and people who could inflict such suffering" and also diminish the speaker's "individuality" (16-17). He reads Dickinson's "splitting of the self" as a means of affirming her own "self-reliance" and "proud detachment from those who did not care to keep her company" (Marcus 19). By pluralizing the self, Dickinson makes potentially dangerous others unnecessary. That may well be an accurate psychological account of Dickinson's rhetoric, but such meaning is not in concert with Levinas's ethics and therefore conflicts with the additional ethical meanings I find in her poem.

that she may never be whole again. This fragmentation thus points toward a kind of death, and may evoke mourning in Dickinson's reader, who sympathetically recognizes the speaker's loss of self in her ambiguous presence. Dickinson describes a feeling that brings a person to the brink of death, a feeling that haunts the borders of subjectivity itself. Such a death-like feeling may not only parallel our fundamental, ethical relationship with the other on an experiential level, but may also constitute a kind of affective "dying for" the other. This loss of self as a response to "great pain" or an event of loss seems to imply the self's radical reliance on the other, without whom the self's very meaning is lost.

In "Desert Places," Frost's rhetoric emphasizes absence as the speaker seems to see only emptiness and death around him. In the fast-falling night, "the ground" is "almost covered smooth in snow," and he imagines the "animals" as being "smothered in their lairs," as if they are suffocated forever by winter instead of cozily hibernating in their homes until spring (Frost, "Desert Places" 3, 6). Yet even these seemingly lifeless creatures apparently have a greater presence than the speaker himself, who is "too absent-spirited to count" and thus falls victim to the personified "loneliness" that merely "includes" him "unawares" (Frost, "Desert Places" 7-8). The speaker is thus barely present both to the snowy scene and to himself. It is "[t]he woods" that "have," as Frank Lentricchia recognizes, not only the snow and the night, but also the emotion of "loneliness"—but not the speaker himself (Lentricchia 97; Frost, "Desert Places" 5, 8). The speaker's personification of the landscape and even of loneliness itself seems to imply a projection of his own humanity onto his surroundings and his emotions. This

attitude of projection toward the landscape and his own emotions in turn implies a distance from or disconnection with himself. In Frost's poem, the speaker's personification of the inanimate landscape and emotions simultaneously entails the inverse gesture of pragmapoeia through which the speaker objectifies or dehumanizes himself. As the speaker's rhetoric makes personhood metaphorically present in the landscape itself, his rhetoric also makes personhood metaphorically absent in himself.

As with Dickinson's poem, the speaker's loss of personhood may evoke mourning in the reader who sympathetically realizes that Frost's speaker fails to cultivate and preserve his own humanity. Both the reader's mourning and sympathy may be ethical responses in Levinas's sense of "compassion" for the other as "a non-useless suffering (or love) . . . which immediately has meaning" in contrast to the "useless" suffering of the self "overwhelmed by the evil that rends it" ("Useless Suffering" 100, 93, 92). This mournful, compassionate response in Frost's reader seems especially meaningful in contrast to the speaker's own loss of his meaning-making agency—a loss that suggests a kind of affective encounter with death laden with a sense of suffering. Apparently a victim to his own emotions, Frost's speaker is not even able to save himself. The speaker's lack of agency seems to expose not only his own vulnerability, but also the vulnerability of the poem itself. The poem seems close to slipping into absence itself given the alienated speaker's all but lost capacity to express himself, which is the poem's origin. Although Frost's speaker, insofar as he is a poet, seems capable of crafting a beautiful poem, its poignancy arises in part from the tension between the speaker's aesthetic wisdom and inability to recognize or to reconnect with himself.

The reader is invited to mourn the paradox of the speaker's artistic ability that still threatens to undermine his very humanity. Indeed the reader's enjoyment and appreciation of both Dickinson's and Frost's respective poems seems to participate in their speakers' own undoing as the reader takes pleasure in the poetic means through which the speakers seem to invoke their own absences. Even as the reader may mourn compassionately for the speakers' losses, she may nonetheless be pleased by witnessing the beauty of the poems' carefully crafted lines—the patterns of alliteration, repetition, and images that so poignantly convey the speakers' desperation. The reader may thus also be invited to mourn for his or her pleasure itself, since its poetic sources also endanger the poems' speakers.

Poetry's Personal Relations

Both Dickinson's and Frost's speakers seem precariously perched on the boundary between life and death, as indicated by their ambiguous and tenuous presences in their respective poems. Because their ambiguous presences are signified by various disconnections from their own emotions—and, in Dickinson's case, from her own body—emotion seems to be an important aspect of self-coherence that allows her to actualize her human agency on an experiential level in response to others. The absence of emotion seems to foreshadow, or even to constitute, the loss of human subjectivity for both speakers. Unable to recognize their emotions as their own, both speakers seem unable to render themselves as coherent persons, and thus seem to have lost their human agency or mastery over their own subjectivity. We may view this loss of coherent self-relation as a portrayal of a conscious experience of the utter rending of the self, which is

effected by other's death. On an ethical level prior to experience, the other's death ruptures the self, and this rupture then becomes the essence of all our genuine responses to others, in Levinas's ethics. Frost and Dickinson seem to emphasize the radical "mournfulness that inflects and inspires ethics" due to our oppressive responsibility to and for the other (Spargo, *Vigilant Memory* 47).

The artistry of both poems, however, seems to deflect the absolute absence of these speakers' subjective agencies. Even as their ability to present themselves as persons starts to slip away, they find agency enough to express that loss in "personal" relations—i.e. relationships between words and between metaphorical images that make their absences and losses present for their readers (Levinas, "Time" 47). The poetic relationships between words as they form patterns like alliteration, repetition, rhyme, and imagery are personal in that they express the speakers' very sense of themselves. In doing so, they allow the speakers' to connect to implied listeners, and the poets themselves to connect to historical readers—thus making personal relations possible. In addition, Spargo notes that "the impossible responsibility structuring ethics" may also reside in "language itself," although we will address this possibility more thoroughly in chapter IV (*Vigilant Memory* 36).

Although these speakers' seem alienated from any stereotypical expression of mourning through representations of weeping or of death itself, their own lack of emotion invites a mournful response in the reader. This effect on the reader affirms the speakers' connections with others through their poetry. Thus Dickinson's and Frost's poems seem to constitute not only "personal" relations between poetic words and

images, but also "personal" relations between rhetorical speakers and audiences (Levinas, "Time" 47). By participating in such relations, the reader herself may both actualize and simultaneously be reminded of her own human agency. In this sense, the speakers' cultivation of their own absence may simultaneously invite their readers to actualize their own human presence. Through this effect on readers, Dickinson and Frost affirm the value of others in the face of personal losses.

Richard Wilbur's Many Faces of Loss

Frost's and Dickinson's poems emphasize the after-effects of loss—the absence of emotion that arises in the wake of loss. Dickinson's "After great pain" and Frost's "Desert Places" are strongly oriented toward the past in that speakers of both poems respond to memories of trauma that haunt the present. In contrast to Dickinson's and Frost's respective emphases on the past, Wilbur's poem illustrates an encounter with—and response to—loss in the present tense, in the moment. These differences in the poems' tenses seem to coincide with a difference in the kinds of responses to loss that these poets represent. Unlike the absence of emotion that torments Dickinson's and Frost's respective speakers, the characters in Richard Wilbur's poem "Boy at the Window" seem burdened by too much emotion. Comparing Wilbur's poem with Frost's and Dickinson's lyrics illustrates the variety of affective responses to loss, exposing the many faces of loss. These faces include two situations of seemingly unbearable affect: one in which speakers feel the weight of affect's absence, and another in which characters feel the weight of affect's overwhelming presence. Affect seems unbearable at both ends of this spectrum.

Wilbur also differs from Frost and Dickinson by explicitly describing how subjectivity arises within a personal relationship with the other. While Frost and Dickinson adopt personas that seem to speak from a first-person perspective (even the absence of first-person pronouns in Dickinson's poem seem to mark the very absence of the speaker's subjectivity, as Marcus notes, rather than an omniscient third-person perspective), Wilbur's poem is clearly told from an omniscient third-person view because we overhear the inner thoughts of both the boy and the snowman. This third-person view represents a conscious experience that expresses the dialogic structure of our ethical relationship to the other. Spargo explains, "For Levinas the death of the other is that paramount example of vulnerability by which every ordinary relationship is marked" (*Vigilant Memory* 32). Wilbur illustrates just such an "ordinary relationship" permeated by loss that emphasizes the radical "vulnerability" of subjectivity (Spargo, *Vigilant Memory* 32).

Wilbur's poem begins with a description of a "small boy" who "weeps" at the very moment he recognizes that the snowman is "standing all alone" in the stormy winter "night" ("Boy" 1-4). The emphasis on the boy's "tearful sight" conveys the child's overwhelming sense of loss that does not respond to a previous loss, but rather expresses his anticipations of losing the snowman to the harsh winter weather (Wilbur, "Boy" 5). The boy's grief implies his personification of the snowman, an inanimate object of nature shaped, presumably by the boy, into a human-like figure, as if nature were fashioned into a kind of metaphor for personhood. The snowman's physical form seems to embody a first layer of personification in that the boy has imposed a human figure onto the natural

element of snow. The boy's fear for the snowman's vulnerability to the harsh winter conditions thus constitutes a second layer of personification as the boy projects his own vulnerable "situation as a human being" onto the snowman (Farrell 86). If the boy's imposition of a human figure onto the snow projects his own physical human form onto nature, then the boy's fear projects his emotional or psychological form onto the snowman. The boy's fear even motivates his personification of the storm as he sees nature "prepar[ing]/A night of gnashings and enormous moan" like a live if not human creature (Wilbur, "Boy" 3-4). A cyclical relationship seems to emerge between the boy's projection and personification, a cycle through which personification seems to motivate his grief and thus beget more projection and personification.

Because this cycle motivates the boy's very emotional mourning, it contrasts starkly with Dickinson's and Frost's personifications, which seem to deflect emotion and personhood. Wilbur's personification, however, seems to distort the snowman's real nature, or, as Spargo puts it, "surrender[ing] the force of the other's alterity" (*Vigilant Memory* 46). From this perspective, the boy's grief seems to be narcissistically sentimental, only insincerely directed toward the other in a manner that remains unethically indifferent to the other's difference. As Rodney Stenning Edgecombe suggests, Wilbur's poem "comes close to sentimentality" (80). Such sentimentality is also evident in Margaret's mourning for Goldengrove in "Spring and Fall." Both Hopkins and Wilbur represent children grieving because they misperceive nature as human—like Wilbur's boy imagines the snowman will die a human death in the storm, Margaret seems to see the autumn leaves as dying a human-like death, responding to them as if

they were gone forever and not part of the trees' cycle of regeneration. We may understand why the boy weeps more thoroughly than we understand why Hopkins's Margaret weeps, however, since Wilbur's omniscient speaker more thoroughly describes the boy's perspective and the feelings that motivate it (as opposed to the distant gaze of Hopkins's speaker who speculates on the reasons for Margaret's grief). In one sense, this insight into the boy's perspective may invite us to identify more closely with the boy than we do with Margaret.

On the other hand, as older readers, our age, experience, knowledge, and even emotional disconnection from the snowman that the boy presumably created allows us to realize the irrationality of mourning for a snowman that can only survive in winter weather and that from a realist perspective has no human sensations to feel lonely or even cold anyway. This realist perspective is wrong, however, in the world of the poem in which the snowman grieves for the boy. The reader's mature recognition of the snowman's lack of human sensations is not unlike Hopkins's speaker's view of Margaret's tears for autumn leaves. Wilbur may thus situate his reader in a position much like that of Hopkins's speaker from which we may recognize the innocence and ignorance of children's mournful misperceptions of nature. Indeed the speaker of Hopkins's poem characterizes Margaret's misunderstanding of the falling leaves for us as naïve in contrast to a more mature, adult perspective that she will grow into—a "colder" view that will not even mourn for "worlds of wanwood" lying "leafmeal" (G. Hopkins, "Spring" 6, 8).

Because Wilbur's speaker does not correct the boy's personification for us as Hopkins's speaker does, Wilbur's poem seems more magical than Hopkins's poem. Wilbur's speaker continues personifying the snowman in the second stanza, affirming the boy's personifying gesture. According to the speaker, the snowman has emotions, as the boy suspects, but he is "content" with instead of fearful of the winter weather that "is his element" (Wilbur, "Boy" 9, 12). Yet the snowman recognizes the boy's tears, and "responds with sadness to the boy's love" (Farrell 86). The snowman's sad, loving response to the boy seems to parallel the speaker's and the poet's apparent role of responding in poetry to the boy. The snowman's "sadness" itself becomes an "act of love," since he is so "moved to see the youngster cry" that "[h]e melts enough to drop from one soft eye/A trickle of the purest rain, a tear/For the child . . ." (Farrell 86; Wilbur, "Boy" 11-15). Farrell explains that "[t]he snowman begins to dissolve as he begins to love" (86).

The snowman's expression of love seems to be, paradoxically, both a gesture of death and a process of becoming more human. The snowman seems so overwhelmed with emotion that he overcomes his own "element" of "frozen water" to cry like the boy—he feels and acts humanely (Wilbur, "Boy" 12). Farrell notes that "[t]he snowman in dissolving does not, after all, die," but rather "is metamorphosed into 'the purest rain.' His love exacts an enormous cost, but the effect on him is, finally, beautiful . . ." (87). In a Levinasian sense, the snowman's "tear" is a "human" gesture "in which worry over the death of the other comes before care for self" (Wilbur, "Boy" 14; Levinas, "Dying For . . ." 216). The snowman's mourning seems like a process of dying for the other, which is,

for Levinas, what it means to become human—as if the boy's personifying gesture brought the snowman to life not only in a figurative/poetic sense, but also in an ethical sense.

While this stanza proves the boy's error in anticipating the snowman's death, it also affirms the boy's gesture of personifying the snowman, which seems like an especially poetic gesture. This emphasis on personification invites readers to recognize that they, too, participate in personifying both the snowman and the boy, who is himself merely a poetic figure. Through this realization, the reader may identify herself with the boy, with the speaker, and with Wilbur himself, who, like the reader, personifies the boy, the snowman, and the speaker. Personification—a gesture of projecting or creating personhood—thus becomes a common ground for connection in a poem about loss and death. Personification, as a process of becoming both human-like and connected with others, thus complements the poem's anticipations of death as an absence of connections and meaning. Through his emphasis on personification, Wilbur recasts death's absence of connection and meaning as a potential common ground on which we may establish connections between poetic characters, the poet, and the reader herself. Thus Wilbur suggests that personification, far from being an element of the romantic/sentimental sensibility of outdated poetry, may be an expression of our Levinasian ability "*to be able*", an imaginative, responsive reaching out to connect with the other ("Time" 42). By portraying the other as a snowman in his poem, Wilbur emphasizes personification as a way of becoming human.

Wilbur's portrayal of personal connections overcoming or recasting death's absence of meaning coincides with Kenneth Burke's theory of identification, which situates "division" as the exigence for identification (*RM* 22). Burke explains that we may identify two people when they share similar "attitude[s]," "interests," emotions, and/or actions (*RM* 55, 20). Such identification, however, involves death-like change: "the *killing* of something is the *changing* of it, and the statement of the thing's nature before and after the change is an *identifying* of it" (Burke, *RM* 20). According to Burke, we must change in a death-like way in order to be connected or identified with others. Thus Burke concludes that "there is no chance of our keeping apart the meanings of persuasion, identification ('consubstantiality') and communication (the nature of rhetoric as 'addressed')" (*RM* 46). For Burke, identification aims to invoke connection where, according to Levinas, death renders relationships fundamentally absent. Wilbur's portrayal of the boy's relationship to the snowman coincides with Burkeian identification by emphasizing the common substance of water in the boy's "weep[ing]" and the snowman's "trickle of the purest rain," a substance that expresses their shared grief ("Boy" 3, 14). By presenting the characters' recognitions of loss as also their means of identification, Wilbur illustrates loss in terms of connection while Burke represents identification in terms of death. Wilbur's inversion of Burke's theory suggests that by recasting loss and death in terms of connections, we may recast death as an exigence for connection and therefore meaningful. Wilbur's emphasis on recasting death in terms of connecting with others may express an elegiac function of making death meaningful.

Wilbur complicates Burkeian identification, however, by inviting us first to recognize the boy's fantastical misperception of the snowman—resulting in our distance from or disidentification with the boy—and then inviting us to sympathize with the boy's perspective. The descriptions of the solitary snowman's "standing all alone," and the bitterly cold weather may evoke our sympathy for the snowman, identifying our gaze with the boy's magical or fantastical view even as we simultaneously acknowledge his error (Wilbur, "Boy" 1). In addition, the snowman's insight into "the child at the bright pane surrounded by/Such warmth, such light, such love, and so much fear" emphasizes the boy's lack of full self-knowledge that seems to apply to other people as well (Wilbur, "Boy" 15-16). The snowman seems to mourn for the boy's—and perhaps humanity's--"imperfect gifts" of "warmth," "light," and "love," which are haunted by "fear" and grief (Farrell 86; Wilbur, "Boy" 16). This insight itself seems to affirm the snowman's human-like form. Thus Wilbur invites us to sympathize with the boy—or even mourn for his lack of knowledge—and ultimately troubles his reader by evoking conflicting attitudes toward the boy by "balanc[ing] feeling and counter feeling" both in his line describing "love" and "fear," and in his rhetorical effects on readers. For Wilbur, such a balance is integral to "honest" and "convincing poetry . . . which accommodates mixed feelings, clashing ideas, and incongruous images" (*Responses* 155, 152). In this poem, Wilbur's conflicting effects expose the force of identification—that it can at least coexist with if not overcome our disidentification from the boy's misperception.

Wilbur's portrayal of death and loss as a process of becoming more human demonstrates how personhood arises in response, in "encountering faces" (Levinas,

"Dying For" 215). Through his response to the boy, the snowman demonstrates how Levinasian responsibility is embedded in dialogic responses. The poem's two stanzas, one focusing on the boy's inner life and the other focusing on the snowman's response, structurally affirms a dialogic relationship between the two characters. When we readers identify ourselves with the boy's conflicting emotions, we may engage with Wilbur's poem dialogically. Because Wilbur's poem turns on dialogic contrasts not only between ideas, but also between words and images, "Boy at the Window" indicates that dialogic contrasts can be simultaneously poetic and rhetorical.

Personifying Presence: Metapoetics as Ethics

The snowman may represent ambiguous presence as both a natural and a human-like creature, one who is personified and then seems to internalize that personification. Through his personification of the snowman, Wilbur comments on what it means to be and to become human. Peter Harris recognizes this emphasis on presence as the "major theme of in Wilbur's work," which as a whole "reflects the central tension in Western metaphysics . . . between being and becoming" (412). In his brief comparison of "Boy at the Window" with Wallace Stevens's "The Snow Man,"—a comparison invited by the status of both poems as short anthology pieces by high modernist poets—Philip White suggests that, while Stevens offers "an affirmation of a metaphysics of absence," Wilbur's "poetry, when pressed, implies a metaphysics of presence" (262).[10] Wilbur's metaphysics of presence in "Boy at the Window," however, emphasizes how presence is

10. Rodney Stenning Edgecombe also notes the resonances between Stevens's and Wilbur's poems, suggesting that Wilbur's "anthropomorphic fantasy seem[s] to challenge the cold deletions and sterilities of Wallace Stevens's snow man poem . . ." (80).

always already bound up with absence, how presence is ambiguous and tenuous in the processes of becoming and of dying—which can in fact be the same process, as in the snowman's case.

Wilbur also seems to argue that personification itself is essential to the processes of being and becoming human. In Wilbur's poem, the boy's personification of the snowman seems to bring the snowman to life in a quite literal sense because the second stanza affirms that snowman does have human-like emotions and thoughts. The boy seems to have brought the snowman to life, not only by giving his "frozen . . . element" human form, but also by loving and grieving for the snowman, emotions which evoke the snowman's similarly human love and grief—and his insights into the complexity of the boy's human emotions (Wilbur, "Boy" 12). Because he creates life-like humanity that, in turn, reflects his own humanity back to him in a magnified way, the boy seems more thoroughly human.

We may view the snowman's insight into the boy's complex emotions as a way of returning the boy's humanizing gaze. Wilbur's affirmation of personification invites us to remember that we also participate in personifying not only the snowman, but also the boy himself, who, until we suspend our disbelief, is only a mere poetic figure instead of a real person. Through our shared acts of personification, we identify ourselves with the boy, the snowman, the speaker, and Wilbur himself. Wilbur's argument about personification may thus offer a counterpart to Stevens's "The Snow Man." Stevens argues, "One must have a mind of winter"—one must have "a mind" of nature instead of personhood—"not to think/Of any misery in the sound of the wind" and recognize

mournful personhood in natural winter (1, 7-8). Wilbur affirms that we view nature through our own human lens, projecting personhood onto nature. Together Stevens and Wilbur suggest that our own humanity obscures our attention to nature's singularity. While personification may be essential to being and becoming human, it may also be a kind of unifying gesture that turns on indifference that elides non-human alterities. Nonetheless the ways in which personification proliferate the presence of personhood in Wilbur's lyric situate personification as both a human and a poetic gesture.

Personification seems to be both a humanizing gesture and a poetic gesture in that Wilbur invites us to see the boy as a poet insofar as he creates and personifies the snowman. We readers also participate in the poetic act insofar as we personify the boy and the snowman, thus affirming the presence of personhood in Wilbur's poem, not unlike the ways in which we affirm presence in Dickinson's and Frost's lyrics. Indeed the gestures of personification enacted by the boy, the speaker, Wilbur, and ourselves seem to provide a common ground that allows us to identify ourselves with Wilbur and his characters. By facilitating readers' identification with characters and the poet, personification seems to involve the same kind of human agency or "mastery" that Levinas describes and that Dickinson and Frost express in their poems (Levinas, "Time" 41). The boy's creative acts of building the snowman and then personifying him impose human meaning and form onto nature—i.e. the boy recognizes humanity where it is absent, making a personal relationship with nature. Through such creativity, the boy performs his abilities "to grasp" in the sense of imagining the snowman and shaping the

snow to reflect that meaning; he is "master of grasping the possible" by giving the snow human-like form (Levinas, "Time" 41).

Personification itself seems to be a similarly creative gesture that entails recognizing, grasping the possibility of human form where it is absent. Wilbur also seems to create personal relations through the poetic relations he crafts in rhyme patterns, like those between "bear," "prepare," "where," and "stare" ("Boy" 2-3, 5, 7). The relationships between the words and images that aim to evoke sympathy, mourning, and perhaps even love in Wilbur's poem are personal in that they express Wilbur's own personal idea/emotion—they are personal to Wilbur. These poetic relationships also engage the reader's personal emotions as well, thus connecting Wilbur at least indirectly with his reader through communication. Indeed Wilbur seems to emphasize the personal nature of these relationships by making the personal encounters between the snowman and the boy—which are both connections and disconnections—the focus of his poem. Wilbur speaks to the ways in which human subjectivity depends both on personal and creative/poetic relations structured by presence and absence.

Because personification and the identifications among characters and readers to which it leads bring such grief and even death to the characters in the poem, Wilbur also reminds us of the risks of poetry and personification—that such creative acts may also be accompanied by death and absence. For example, the boy's personification of the snowman seems risky because he fails to recognize the snowman's essentially natural essence, a failure that seems to threaten the snowman's singularity and, in a more general sense, the singularity of nature as its own, non-human entity. Just as it may be risky to

imagine personhood where it is not and may not belong, it is similarly risky not to recognize personhood where it does belong. In her article "Giving an Account of Oneself," Judith Butler observes that our recognition of one another as human is mediated by language and "a set of norms" that determine, along with "epistemological frame[s] . . . anthropocentric dispositions and cultural frames," if "a given face [will or will not] seem to be a human face to any one of us" (24, 23). The mediated nature of human recognition begs the question "under what conditions do some individuals acquire a face, a legible and visible face, and others do not?" (Butler 23). This question implies the reality that members of oppressed groups are not always recognized as human—that humanity is made absent where in fact it should be present.

Dickinson and Frost demonstrate how this pragmapoeic event may occur in instances where one does not recognize oneself, and Butler emphasizes the dangers of pragmapoeia when it shapes our relationships with other people. Wilbur seems keenly aware that both personification and pragmapoeia can endanger others and ourselves, even while they may also help create beautiful, personal relationships. Wilbur affirms that presence, especially human presence, is always connected with absence. This intimate connection between presence and absence echoes the deflected human presence in Dickinson and Frost, who also affirm the coincidence of absence and presence.

Lyric as a Genre of the Wound

Together Dickinson, Frost, and Wilbur demonstrate the wide range of expressions that may imply a sense of loss. Wilbur illustrates a microcosm of loss's affective diversity in his closing line where repetition links conflicting feelings: The

snowman grieves "[f]or the child at the bright pane surrounded by/Such warmth, such light, such love, and so much fear" ("Boy" 15-16). As Wilbur connects emotions that we may assume to be opposites, "love" and "fear," he affirms the deep ambiguity of emotional responses to loss and death ("Boy" 16). By reading Wilbur's poem as affective account of loss, we affirm Wilbur's willingness to engage darker aspects of human life. Our reading aligns with critical commentary about themes of death and mourning in Wilbur by scholars like Philip White, Alan Sullivan, and John Gery, who collectively counter Randall Jarrell's famous criticism that Wilbur "never goes far enough" in addressing what Gery calls "the dangers of the modern condition" (Jarrell qtd. in Gery 113; Gery 113). Although critics like Edgecombe may find Wilbur's poem falling into self-centered sentimentality, I suggest that Wilbur engages his readers' emotions in order to argue about the conflicted nature of human feelings, and how they respond complexly to ambiguities of presence and absence (80). The philosophical thrust of Wilbur's reflection on the varieties of human presences and absences exceeds merely clichéd sentimentality.

Indeed the emotional images that Edgecombe critiques—i.e. "the description of the boy's eye . . . and the measurement of the single tear (with its effect of squeezed-out emotion)"—may be more than merely sentimental in that it may convey a complex response to loss and trauma (80). Wilbur's image aligns with the poetic styles that, according to Jeffrey Sychterz, may facilitate important philosophical work and psychological healing for poets and readers responding to trauma. Sychterz explains that "[p]oetic devices" like "imagery locate meaning in the epiphanic moment of the poem's

speaking, rather than deferring it through the causal chain of plot" (144). Lyric poetry like Wilbur's "Boy at the Window" relies primarily on fragmented, "imagistic" style and the "heft" of words' "sound and feel" for meaning rather than on a narrative sequence of events (Sychterz 144). Sychterz explains how these lyric elements mirror traumatic memory, which "notably invoke[s] a lyric mode of meaning" according to posttraumatic stress counselor Judith Herman's account of its "vivid sensations and images" that are often "fragmentary" and "without context" (145; Herman qtd. Sychterz 145). Context seems only minimally present in Wilbur's poem—we have no explicit account of the boy building the snowman or of who the boy is specifically. This lack of context and of individual details about the boy—who has no name—may make universalizing appeals to readers not unlike the universalizing rhetoric of Dickinson's poem. The fragmented pieces of information about the boy's feelings that the poem does describe invite us to participate in fulfilling the poem's coherence, at least by identifying ourselves with the boy's affective plight if not also by imagining details implied by the poem, like the boy building the snowman. Although Wilbur's poem does not seem to describe a memory of the kind of traumatic experience of extremity that Carolyn Forché commemorates in *Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness*, Wilbur's lyrical illustrations of emotion seem to share a similar form with traumatic memory.

Cathy Caruth's definition of trauma as an essentially "unknown" experience helps clarify how the boy's personifying view of the snowman relates to trauma (4). In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Caruth theorizes from Freud that trauma "is a wound inflicted . . . upon the mind" by "an event that . . . is experienced

too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (4). Trauma repeats itself in memories, "return[ing] to haunt the survivor later on" because "of its very unassimilated nature" (Caruth 4). Thus trauma "is always a story of a wound . . . that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth 4). This essentially "unknown" nature of trauma's hauntings echoes Levinas's emphasis on "[t]he unknown of death" ("Time and the Other" 40). Levinas's generally mournful rhetoric, as explained by Spargo and Jeannine Thyreen-Mizingou, affirms that ethical subjectivity is an essentially traumatic position; Levinas describes ethical responsibility to the other as "[t]he trauma of persecution" and the human "subject" as "a hostage" ("Substitution" 101). Levinas's account of subjectivity itself as traumatized suggests that traumatic experiences may share a similar structure with what he considers to be the ethical shape of human subjects.

Wilbur's description of the boy has resonances of traumatic elements that Levinas recognizes in subjectivity itself. The boy in Wilbur's poem imaginatively encounters death as he anticipates the snowman's physical suffering in the storm, which of course is a projection of his own physical suffering. The boy seems to confront death in this moment when he fearfully imagines the snowman dying in the violent storm—an idea which, as the second stanza exposes, is really fear inspired by his own vulnerability in the face of storm that would likely mean death for him if he were outdoors. The boy's experience seems traumatic in that it involves a lack of knowledge about himself and a

confrontation with death.[11] The boy's mourning itself may express the kind of mournful, traumatic position of a Levinasian subject. The absence of emotion may, however, be another kind of trauma. In "A Speech at a Ceremony," Wilbur suggests, "When we miss out on our emotional opportunities, we are upset at the moment of failure; and we are also nagged ever after by a sense of not having measured up, a sense of unfinished and unfinishable business" (*Responses* 92). Wilbur seems to speak to the kind of mourning of affect's absence that Dickinson and Frost portray. Together, Wilbur's, Dickinson's, and Frost's lyrics affirm that personhood and human subjectivity are integrally tied to emotion.

In *The Healing Spirit of Haiku*, David Rosen and Joel Weishaus affirm that traumatic psychological presences of death do not have to involve extreme physical suffering. In the section "Feeling Death," Rosen explains that he was "suffering from melancholy due to years of marital strife" to the point that he "felt like [he] was dying" (12). Death was psychological and emotionally present for Rosen, even though he was not deprived of physical necessities. Weishaus responds to Rosen's story with his own account of a near-death experience as he lay ill and alone "in a dilapidated farmhouse in the mountains northwest of Tokyo," believing he "was going to die" if he "feel asleep"

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11. The boy's confrontation with death in "Boy at the Window" seems to offer a complementary image to that of another child's confrontation with death in "The Pardon." In this poem, the boy feels very much "afraid" when his dog dies, but can only mourn its death belatedly. Alan Sullivan recognizes this boy's problem of mourning as a paradox in which the boy "refuses to mourn" yet "in another sense . . . refuses to *quit* mourning" (88). Sullivan "conclude[s] that 'The Pardon' is an attempt to . . . atone for a failure" to mourn, which is what Wilbur sees as missing an emotional opportunity (88). The boy in the window, on the other hand, does seem to actualize this emotional opportunity presented when he confronts the deaths of his snowman and himself.

(13). Rosen and Weishaus suggest that both physical and psychological suffering can evoke feelings of death, making death psychologically present for the individual. Wilbur's boy seems to have a similar kind of psychological encounter with death through his personification of and grief for the snowman.

Carolyn Forché even suggests, via Walter Benjamin's theory of translating poetry, that "a poem is *itself* an event, a trauma that changes both a common language and an individual psyche," albeit "a specific kind of trauma" that "belong[s] to a different order of being from the trauma that marked its language in the first place" (33). The poetry of witness in Forché's collection reminds readers of atrocities we might rather forget in order to resist "diseased complacency" with the oppressive status quo (32). By "bear[ing] witness to the ravages of our time"—like "exile, state censorship, political persecution, house arrest, torture, imprisonment, military occupation, warfare and assassination"—this poetry resists "the political" and "defends the individual against illegitimate forms of coercion" (Forché 45, 29). The poems perform such resistance by "attempt[ing] to mark, to change, to impress, but never to leave things as they are," challenging readers' motives and assumptions by changing language and challenging the linguistic "set of norms" that Judith Butler describes (Forché 33; Butler 23). While there may be specific kinds of trauma from "different order[s] of being," death, and perhaps trauma, can be psychologically present for people suffering affectively, such as Wilbur's boy and Rosen (Forché 33). Indeed Forché affirms that the very structure of poetry reflects that of traumatic events. We may encounter trauma physically, emotionally,

and/or poetically; such traumatic experiences seem to reflect the inherently traumatic nature of Levinas's human subjectivity.

Indeed the emotions in Wilbur's poem that Edgecombe accuses of being merely sentimental may in fact contribute to a kind of traumatic effect that Wilbur's poem may have on us. Nadel explains that "Boy at the Window" reminds us of "the child's experience" of wonder, which "[a]dults become numb to. . . ." (107). Wilbur achieves this effect in part by using "common speech" to convey complex ideas (Nadel 107). For example, the description "still, he is moved" sounds ordinary, but it "exposes" the "paradox" that "[t]he snowman is still—is unmoveable—yet he is moved" (Nadel 107). The image of the snowman being brought to life as he is moved to tears invites us to view common concepts like being emotionally touched in new ways. Wilbur suggests that our ordinary experiences of being moved to tears are essential to being human. By challenging our assumptions in this way, Wilbur resists and perhaps even traumatizes our understanding of language and of what it means to be human, making us look with awe-struck eyes at what we may have once taken for granted.

Nadel uses Wilbur's poem "The Beautiful Changes" to describe this radical process of effecting wonder in the reader. In this poem, Wilbur writes "the beautiful changes/In such kind ways,/Wishing ever to sunder/Things and things' selves for a second finding, to lose/For a moment all that it touches back to wonder" ("Beautiful" 14-18). Here the trauma of "sunder[ing]/Things and things' selves" leads, as trauma does, to loss, albeit a loss that gives rise to "wonder" (Wilbur, "Beautiful" 16-18). Wilbur characterizes beauty as something that is both a source of pleasure and, due to the

change and loss it may invoke, a source of grief. Wilbur also challenges our assumptions, though, that loss is always only a source of mourning; "The Beautiful Changes" suggests that loss itself can be both a source of pleasurable "wonder" and also a source of grief. The aim to free ordinary language and assumptions "for a second finding" also emerges in "Boy at the Window" as Wilbur challenges our assumptions about language and being human ("Beautiful" 17).

"Boy at the Window" may challenge our assumptions about poetry via its metapoetic self-reflexivity that makes us self-reflexively aware of our own participation in the poem's personifications. Wilbur's emphasis on the poetic act of personification draws attention to the poem's own process of becoming. Personification is fundamental to the poem's very presence since the boy's personification of the snowman and his resulting grief are represented as the poem's exigence. J. M. Reibetanz recognizes this kind of self-reflexive gesture as integral to all of Wilbur's work; he claims "that Wilbur's special signature is to write reflexively, turning his poems back on themselves to reflect on their own ontology. . . ." (609). By emphasizing how its "ontology" depends on personification, the poem invites us to recognize our own participation in that personification and in constituting the poem's meaningful presence. The poem's self-reflexivity thus invites us to adopt our own self-reflexive perspective from which we may recognize not only how our acts of personification contribute to the presence of the poem, but also how those acts contribute to the presence of humanity itself—to constituting others and ourselves as human subjects.

Such self-reflexivity invites readers to adopt not only a self-reflexive relation within themselves, but also a relation toward humanity. In these two respects, Wilbur's self-reflexivity thus seems to constitute an appeal to relation, to our desire (under girded by Levinasian responsibility) for relationships with others and with ourselves. This appeal to relation coincides with Wilbur's appeal to presence, conveyed by the almost hyperbolic presences of personhood in "Boy at the Window," affirming Levinas's connection between subjectivity and the self's responsible relation to the other. To the extent that these two appeals coincide, Wilbur seems to emphasize above all the appeal of the presence of relation to those facing loss and absence—as if feeling the presence of absence enhances our desire for affirmations of presence and of relation. While the effects of Wilbur's appeal to self-reflexivity may console readers in this sense, this self-reflexivity may also disturb readers insofar as it resists their assumptions about human relations by showing how humanity may be conveyed through personification. These self-reflexive valences of "Boy at the Window" also position this poem as itself a kind of witness—it is a poem that witnesses its own process of becoming and, in doing so, invites us to witness our own process of becoming human. By helping readers recognize or "remember" their human nature, the trauma of Wilbur's poem may itself also be a source of consolation.

In emphasizing our participation in the poem's personification, "Boy at the Window" reminds us of our own human agency. Like the boy creates a meaningful human form out of the snow, we are likewise capable of grasping, recognizing possibilities and creating meaningful, personal relationships by reading the poem.

Jeffrey Sychterz suggests that poetry in general may help survivors cope with un-narratable trauma since it may serve as a "pre-narrative communication" that allows survivors to express, to return to, and eventually to assimilate their fragmented, unknown traumatic experience (144). He associates the lyric genre with open wounds that have yet to cohere or "close" their "meaning" (Sychterz 144). The kind of sentimental images that Edgecombe critiques in "Boy at the Window" may express the kind of fragmented affects to which survivors must repeatedly return before they can narrate trauma.

Cathy Caruth suggests that to narrate trauma is itself a kind of ethical imperative. She explains that survival itself can change one's existential attitude about one's relations to others and oneself. Caruth explains how surviving the death of a loved one changes a person from an attitude that responds to the "living" beloved to an attitude that "receives the very gap between the other's death and his own life. . . ." (106). Theorizing through Freud and Lacan, Caruth suggests that this "survivor" attitude entails "an impossible responsibility of consciousness in its own originating relation to others, and specifically to the deaths of others" (104). The death of the other seems to compel me not only to "*tell the story*" of the other, affirming her life, but also to tell my own story of "*what it means not to see*" the other's death because of my own wish for her living presence (Caruth 105). In Wilbur's poem, the boy's personification of the snowman positions the boy himself as the survivor, since he is the one who looks out at the storm from a safe shelter. This view of the boy as survivor, as one who imagines himself needing to account for his snowman's death, may offer an appeal to readers to identify with this "survivor" stance, and perhaps even to recognize the kind of ethical imperative conveyed

through the structure of responsibility it seems to share with Levinasian subjectivity itself. Such coincidences between poetic attitudes toward trauma and literal traumatic events that involve physical suffering validate poetry as a particularly appropriate medium for expressing one's responses to trauma and thus also for coping with the enduring effects of traumatic events.

Elegy vs. Anti-Elegy

Even as our responses may all express, to greater and lesser degrees, the ethical essence of subjectivity, our responses themselves may not be equally ethical. In "'Grief without Grievance': Robert Frost's Modern Elegy," Eleanor DesPrez outlines Derrida's critique of "the very act of commemorating another who has died," which "entails limiting, even destroying, that other . . ." (30). DesPrez finds Frost "anticipat[ing] Derrida's resistance to reducing the dead to any sort of loot for the living" in poems like "The Spoils of the Dead," which convey his "strict poetic and ethical standard" that "death should occasion sorrow and dread, not pleasure, and so the 'spoils of the dead' should not be aestheticized in poems" (DesPrez 34). We may recognize this "anti-elegiac principle" in the affective restraint expressed in "Desert Places," in which the resonances of grief are subtle and do not even seem to belong to the mourner himself (DesPrez 34). We may identify "After great pain" with this "anti-elegiac principle" as well, given the speaker's restrained emotions (DesPrez 34).

When Frost does grieve poetically, as DesPrez demonstrates in "To E.T.," his speaker ultimately mourns for his own loss. This elegy for Edward Thomas, Frost's poet friend who died in World War I, ends with Frost's speaker "ask[ing] how the end of the

war can even be real 'If I was not to speak of it to you/And see you pleased once more with words of mine?'" (DesPrez 37; Frost qtd. in DesPrez 37). DesPrez explains that "the loss he cannot assimilate is his loss of a *witness* to his own life and work" (37). This poem may also connote, however, a Levinasian sense of loss of "the other" who "assigns meaning unto the self" (Spargo, *Vigilant Memory* 47). Even a "mourner's self-involvement," like that of Frost's speaker and Wilbur's boy, may express aspects of Levinasian responsibility to the other. This kind of affective mourning may serve other ethical purposes as well in that it may help us actualize our "emotional opportunities" and "release a suitable emotion, persuade us that we are adequate to life, and so assist us to live some more;" Wilbur claims, "A prudent heart will not despise such aids" (*Responses* 92-93). I suggest that Wilbur's emphasis on not allowing our "emotional opportunities" to pass us by may implicitly emphasize our human agency—our ability "*to be able*" (*Responses* 92; "Time" 42). This agency allows us to act on an experiential level, allowing us to actualize our ethical responsibility to the other. Anti-elegies like Frost's "Desert Places" and Dickinson's "After great pain" may represent ethical mourning by attempting to preserve the other's alterity. Affective elegies, like Wilbur's "Boy at the Window" may represent ethical mourning insofar as they help readers actualize their "emotional opportunities," appealing to their human agency on which their responsible actions depend (Wilbur, *Responses* 92).

Poetry as a Healing Process

Wilbur identifies poetry as a deeply ethical genre that is defined in part by its consoling effects. He explains, "My first poems were written in answer to the inner and

outer disorders of the Second World War and they helped me, as poems should, to take ahold of raw events and convert them, provisionally, into experience" (Wilbur, *Responses* 152). Much like the personal and cultural difficulties surrounding Dickinson's and Frost's poems, war seems to have motivated Wilbur's poetic turn. Poetry is most significantly a response to the loss of order (which entails the loss of relations) for Wilbur, as he expresses to Stanley J. Kunitz, "One does not use poetry for its major purposes, as a means of organizing oneself and the world, until one's world somehow gets out of hand. A general cataclysm is not required; the disorder must be personal and may be wholly so, but poetry, to be vital, does seem to need a periodic acquaintance with the threat of Chaos" (Wilbur qtd. in Hill 21). Loss of order thus seems to be an important connection between life and poetry for Wilbur.

Philip White suggests that poetry serves a similar function of ordering experience for Frost, for whom poetry was "clarification of life . . . a momentary stay against confusion" (Frost qtd. in White 250). Such "confusion" may well have seemed like a matter of life or death to Frost, haunted by his mother's "incipient insanity," and the mental illnesses that underlay his sister's and his daughter's institutionalizations, his son's suicide, and his own "tendency toward depression" (Parini 9, 199, 375, 332, 444). In "The Writer," Wilbur concludes his description of his daughter writing a short story by telling her "It is always a matter, my darling,/Of life or death, as I had forgotten" ("The Writer" 31-32). Writing poetry thus seems to be nothing less than a kind of essential, existential affirmation of a person's presence against an impending threat of losing oneself. Levinas's account of our responsibility to the other shows us that these

existential issues are ethical at heart and are also the very threshold of subjectivity itself.[12]

Rosen and Weishaus affirm lyric poetry's healing capacity. Healing, for Rosen and Weishaus, involves "becoming whole" in part by "'sacrific(ing) . . . the ego to the Self, a higher principle'" (5; Rosen qtd. in Rosen and Weishaus 5). Death can be an important part of this process since the death of the ego can help one develop "a larger life" (Rosen and Weishaus 5). Rosen describes their book *The Healing Spirit of Haiku* as "not a self-help book . . . but rather a non-self (beyond the ego) healing volume that ideally helps one to realize that we are alone, yet interconnected" (2). Both Rosen and Weishaus express how much reading and writing haiku has helped them heal; Weishaus claims that "every haiku is a prescription for a larger life" because of haiku's

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12. Frost's and Wilbur's lives literally coincided in Cambridge, Massachusetts. At Harvard, Wilbur finished his Masters in 1947 and became an Assistant Professor in 1950 (Hill 13). Wilbur's wife remembers "late evenings in Cambridge when she and the younger poet lounged on the floor at Frost's house, reciting to the now-old man poem after poem from his own work" (Michelson 29). Michelson notes that this personal connection informs Wilbur's "Homage to R. F.," entitled "Seed Leaves," and this poem of Wilbur's has inspired several scholarly comparisons between Frost and Wilbur, including commentary by Donald Hill and John B. Hougen in addition to Michelson. Frost also had ongoing professional associations with Amherst College, where Wilbur earned his B.A. in 1942 ("Robert Frost and Amherst;" Hill 13). Amherst College was in fact founded by Emily Dickinson's grandfather, Samuel Fowler Dickinson, and Dickinson herself spent the majority of her life in her family's Amherst home (Pollak 20, 24-25). These biographical coincidences underlie stylistic comparisons both between Frost and Wilbur, such as those by Philip White, Allan Sullivan, and Peter Harris, in addition to comparisons between Wilbur and Dickinson, as made Donald Hill, Ralph J. Mills, Jr., Bruce Michelson, and John Gery. Rodney Stenning Edgecombe observes that like Dickinson, Wilbur "undertakes journeys into nothingness that have the semblance of a normal outing" (139). Indeed Wilbur himself summarizes the "sentiment of lack" that he recognizes in Dickinson's oeuvre in a speech he gave in her honor at Amherst in 1959, affirming the similarities of both place and purpose that resonate in amidst Dickinson's, Wilbur's, and Frost's poetics of loss (*Responses* 16).

"[c]ompunded wholeness (healing) . . . and emptiness (non-being/being)" (5). In their "Feeling Death" section, Rosen and Weishaus explain that writing poetry helped them cope with their encounters with death; Rosen describes how tears ended his melancholic, "deadening writer's block," and Weishaus survived his near-death illness by "scribbling in [his] notebook" all night (12-13). Writing, even if only incoherent "scribbling," helped Weishaus to face death in the moment before he narrated his story to readers.

Similarly, Mell McDonnell relied on Emily Dickinson's lyric "'Hope' is a thing with feathers" as she struggled to survive the United Airlines Flight 232 crash in July 1989. McDonnell describes how, when the captain announced the blown-out engine, fragmented thoughts of "[o]ld prayers, old poems, and thoughts of my family race[d] through my head," along with the question, "What's the right way to die?" (65). Amidst her chaotic thoughts, the "Emily Dickinson poem [rose] to the surface" (65). McDonnell conveys the trauma of her experience through the fragmented, present-tense style of her narrative, through which she weaves fragments of Dickinson's poem. Although McDonnell did not write a poem or the narrative in the moment she faced death like Weishaus wrote in his notebook, she still remembered Dickinson's poetry, the rhymes and rhythms of which were a source of life-sustaining order amidst the chaos of the crash—and it is only after the crash that she can retrospectively create a narrative about the event. McDonnell's anecdote suggests that lyric repetition may not only express incoherent un-narratable images, as Sychterz suggests, but may also function as a mnemonic device, allowing poetry readers like McDonnell to rely on snippets of order in other writers' words when encounter their own moments of incoherent distress.

Insofar as lyric poetry as a genre may help us cope with loss, Wilbur's "Boy at the Window" seems to be a rich emotional resource for readers dealing with loss. The loss of connection between the snowman and the boy—and the boy's loss of connection with himself, his unawareness of his own acts of personification and projection—make loss a central theme of Wilbur's poem. The loss of connection between the snowman and the boy, and their respective gestures of mourning, seem to depend in part on each character's narcissistic projection of himself onto the other, as, for example, when the boy projects his own fear of the winter weather onto the snowman. Loss of connection, including misunderstanding of an other, may be the cause of much of our grief, Wilbur seems to suggest in line with Hopkins. The boy's and the snowman's grief and sense of loss nevertheless become a common ground of connection between the boy and the snowman and the reader who sympathize with his sadness. Wilbur suggests that love, fear—and even wonder, as Nadel proposes—are all connected to loss, an appeal that complicates our assumptions that loss turns only on affects of mourning and grief by demonstrating that loss may in fact have many faces. Thus Wilbur seems to appeal to a broad, diverse audience of readers who may have had many kinds of experiences of and responses to loss, experiences that exceeded stereotypical, even sentimental accounts of mourning. Wilbur's depiction of deep and diverse affects of loss counters Dickinson's and Frost's illustrations of affect's absence, and together these poets represent a continuum of various ways in which affect may be both present and absent in the face of loss.

Epideictic Rhetoric as Poetry's Healing Power

As readers participate in substantiating personal presence in Frost's, Dickinson's, and Wilbur's poems, we may recognize the poems' potential to comfort readers and writers alike. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke identifies both external and internal audiences, suggesting that "a man can be his own audience, insofar as he, even in his secret thoughts, cultivates certain ideas or images for the effect he hopes they may have upon him" (38). Given the personal and cultural hardships surrounding both Frost and Dickinson when they composed their respective lyrics, we may infer that these authors wrote poems in "hopes" that their poetic images would have a comforting "effect" on themselves (Burke, *RM* 38). Gregory Orr argues, "Many of Dickinson's greatest poems are tiny dramas of survival . . . The writing of poems is *how* she survived" (13). This life-sustaining effect of Dickinson's poetry also applies to her readers, who "can also participate in this vitalizing survival by reading her poems . . . with lyric identification" through which "*her* survival becomes *our* survival" (Orr 13). Orr names this effect "the intimate rescue mode of the personal lyric," which suggests that Frost and Wilbur and other lyricists may have similar effects on their readers, too (13). Lyric poetry like Frost's, Dickinson's, and Wilbur's thus seems capable of having the same consoling effects on readers that writers may hope to craft for themselves. As Orr suggests, such similar effects may create personal relationships between writers and readers across distances of time, space, and experience (26). By invoking personal connections across such distances, these lyrics seem to embody Jeffrey Walker's definition of epideictic as "speaking across boundaries *persuasively* . . ." (330).

In this sense, poetry seems to affirm a human community across vast boundaries, which may account for the appeal of poetry in the face of crises like 9/11. Poetry's communal effect turns on its ability to affirm the humanity of writers and readers alike. In her account of the poetry's mass popularity in the wake of 9/11, Dinitia Smith quotes former U.S. poet laureate Billy Collins, who observes that "in times of crisis it's interesting that people don't turn to the novel or say, 'We should all go out to a movie,' or, 'Ballet would help us.' It's always poetry. What we want to hear is a human voice speaking directly in our ear." Dickinson, Frost, and Wilbur all express "human voice[s]" successfully in their poetry, voices that remind readers of the "pitiable" state of human "mortality" (Collins qtd. in D. Smith; Walker 253). Such an appeal thus affirms readers' connections with everyone who has already and will have to face death. Lyric poems not only affirm readers' connections with a human community, however, but also affirm their own singular humanity. One of Collins's predecessors, Robert Pinsky, explains, "Poetry has an intimacy because it is in the readers' voice, in one's own breath . . . With poetry, you say it aloud yourself, in your own voice" (qtd. in D. Smith). Pinsky and Collins invite us to see Dickinson's and Frost's poems as expressing their authors' "human voice[s]" in a form that allows readers to actualize their own human singularity by reading the poems aloud (Collins qtd. in D. Smith). By affirming the humanity of writers and readers alike, poetry cultivates personal, dialogic relationships that seem to constitute, at least in part, the healing power of epideictic poetry.

Poetics of Loss

Although Walker de-emphasizes contemporary poetry's "reconfirm[ation] of the group's existing pieties and hierarchies of value," deeming such community-affirming effects as merely "a minor kind of epideictic," the cultural and ethical significance of such effects are important in light of the poetics of violence that, according to Sychterz, culminates in modern poetry's responses to twentieth-century violence (Walker 330). Sychterz explains that due to the "globalized wars and ever more potent weapons of mass destruction" during the twentieth century, this era is characterized by a "festishization of war" (137). In response to this cultural context of violence, "[p]oetry has increasingly become a privileged site for confronting violence in its myriad forms," which Sychterz corroborates with his analysis of wounds, scars, and lyric and narrative genres (Sychterz 137). Although this "fetishization" implies a celebration of violence, Dickinson, Frost, and Wilbur seem to emphasize mournful dimensions of loss, an emphasis that may be another side of the coin (Sychterz 137). In both celebrating and mourning violence and loss, poetry functions epideictically by mediating and influencing our responses to loss and violence. Indeed these poets' reflections on loss and affect seem to be a kind of rhetorical project that is essential to our collective processes of healing from and preventing future violence. Poetry may not only help us respond to loss in more ethical ways, but may also help us find more ethical alternatives to violence. As such lyric poetry seems like more than a "minor kind of epideictic" rhetoric (Walker 330).

The Value of Rhetoric

As this chapter traces the rhetorical and ethical valences of Frost's and Dickinson's poems, it speaks to rhetoric's ability to contribute to literary criticism—an issue Don Bialostosky takes up in his analysis of rhetorical criticism's recent history. In addressing the division between deconstruction's and the Chicago school's conflicting definitions of rhetoric during the 1970s and 1980s, Bialostosky asks how rhetorical study might move beyond such polarizing, "stipulative" approaches and develop more useful tools for analyzing literature rhetorically. In hopes of promoting more useful rhetorical criticism, Bialostosky raises a range of questions, such as:

> What difference does it make to literary criticism that most of the writers for most of the Western literary tradition were schooled . . . in rhetoric and wrote what we have come to call literary texts in a context of rhetorical ends and rhetorical resources . . . what discoveries could we make about what they expected their readers to know and value . . . ?

This chapter responds to such issues by demonstrating that Frost and Dickinson assume their audience, whether external, internal, or both, is acquainted with loss and even death. This assumption contributes to these authors' appeals to human mortality, appeals that help create humane connections among writers and readers—connections that may be especially comforting and valuable to people coping with death and loss.

Our recognition of such ethical effects of poetry depends in part on rhetorical criticism that emphasizes relationships between speakers and listeners, writers and readers. Rhetorical criticism's emphasis on relationships helps us contextualize poetry—

and literature in general—historically, biographically, and philosophically. Thus rhetoric helps us not only to recognize poetic dialogues between writers and readers, but also to negotiate dialogic connections between literature and other disciplines. These dialogic connections affirm literature's epideictic valences and the ethical value of rhetoric. Perhaps through these various dialogic contexts, rhetoric appeals to us across boundaries of time, space, and experience, offering us hope in situations of loss.

CHAPTER IV

ELEGIAC RESPONSIBILITIES: CONSOLATION IN DIALOGUE

"Responsibility for the other, this way of answering without a prior commitment, is human fraternity itself, and it is prior to freedom" (Levinas, "Substitution" 106).

"[F]rom the start, the other affects us despite ourselves" (Levinas, "Substitution" 118).

Consolation and Its Discontents

In the wake of tragedy, the search for consolation seems like an appropriate motive for reading and writing poems. Theorists of the elegy, however, express conflicting attitudes about consolation. For example, Peter Sacks views consolation as the end of mourning. Writing poetry allows the elegist to fulfill "an act of substitution" by which she lets go of the lost other and "reattach[es] to a new love object" or objects, such as the poem itself, which serves as a "consolation prize" (114, 5). According to Sacks, "no work of mourning is complete" without substitution, which satisfies the elegist's search for consolation by ending her grief (114, 1).

Sacks acknowledges, however, that conventional elegiac mourning may seem unappealing to contemporary audiences frustrated by "the ways in which death has tended to become obscene, meaningless, impersonal" through "large-scale war . . . genocide" and even modern medicine's advanced technologies, which can "clinically" conceal and de-personalize death (299). Jahan Ramazani echoes these concerns in his treatment of the modern elegy, noting "the vexed experience of grief in the modern world" fraught with "moral doubts, metaphysical skepticisms, and emotional tangles"

(x). Ramazani claims, "We need elegies that, while imbued with grief, can hold up to the acid suspicions of our moment" (x). Such suspicions, Eleanor DesPrez indicates, may include concern about "language's inadequacy to" convey "not only personal grief but also large cultural and historical losses . . ." (Ramazani x; DesPrez 30).

Ramazani and DesPrez, along with Tammy Clewell and R. Clifton Spargo, critique Sacks's emphasis on consolation as an end to mourning and theorize anti-elegiac, and even anti-consolatory modes of mourning as alternatives to "compensatory" mourning (Ramazani 3). Ramazani argues, "In becoming anti-elegiac, the modern elegy . . . becomes anti-consolatory . . . anti-Romantic . . . anti-conventional and sometimes even anti-literary" (2). As an alternative to Freudian consolatory mourning, modern anti-elegiac mourning is, according to Ramazani, "unresolved, violent . . . ambivalent," and, above all, endless (4). Spargo likewise traces "a strain of melancholic or anti-elegiac lyric that foresees no end to mourning" and "resist[s] . . . elegiac conventions" (13). Spargo sees himself extending Ramazani's and Sacks's descriptions of modern grief's frustrations; he recognizes "incomplete mourning" as "an ethical acknowledgement of . . . the radical alterity of the other whom one mourns" (13). Conventional grief and consolation may undermine the other's difference, further injuring the lost other, whom the mourner supposedly aims to protect.

Such injury may occur, for example, when a mourner uses a lost other to achieve aesthetic pleasure. Ramazani and DesPrez both observe "melancholic anxieties about redeeming loss as poetic gain" (Ramazani 7). DesPrez identifies such anxiety in Frost's "The Spoils of the Dead," which expresses an "anti-elegiac principle" opposed to

"aestheticiz[ing]" the dead in order to maximize poetic "pleasure" (34). Aestheticization endangers the dead in that "the very act of commemorating another who has died entails limiting, even destroying, that other" as, according to Jacques Derrida, the mourner internalizes his or her "image" or "ideal" of the lost other, thereby destroying the other's difference even after her death (DesPrez 30; Derrida qtd. in DesPrez 30). DesPrez explains Derrida's fear of posthumously injuring a lost other: "Memorials, even those interior memorials that are the goals of the work of healthy mourning as Fred defines it, become, in Derrida's account, brutal ways to confine the other, to digest the past reality of the other into the present self," and thereby destroy the other's singularity, including the singularity of her death (31). Likewise, Tammy Clewell explains that Sacks's "model of compensatory mourning depends on a denial of otherness, a denial that occurs exactly at the moment the other is represented and memorialized" (52). This anti-elegiac perspective seems to view elegiac consolation as perpetuating harm to the lost other, and therefore prefers endless mourning over consolation.

This ethical critique of consolation, however, seems to negate the important healing process of consolation on which mourners' well-being depends. Ramazani, DesPrez, and Clewell seem to imply that mourners like Dickinson's and Frost's speakers—who express depressed, death-like attitudes—should remain in their paralyzing, perhaps even dysfunctional grief. Because grief is often a crippling experience, consolation seems essential for grievers' well-being. Where is concern for the griever in these critiques of consolation? Are we compelled to mourn endlessly, forever denying our desire for consolation, in order to avoid further injuring our lost

loved ones? I take these theorists to be describing contemporary anxieties about consolation, not prescribing that we and all mourners should forever deny our desire "to alleviate . . . sorrow" ("Console"). For example, Clewell identifies "Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans War Memorial, Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, and Toni Morrison's fiction" as "abandon[ing]" consolation, as it is conventionally represented (53). I suggest, however, that these theorists—and the poets I analyze in this chapter—may value unconventional kinds of consolation through which mourners' responsibility to lost others endures. We can remember lost loved ones—our memories of them may even continue to shape our relationships with other people and our worldview—without continuously grieving.

In a letter Freud wrote almost a decade after his daughter died, he describes a kind of unending mourning that might still temper sorrow. Freud writes, "Although we know that after such a loss the acute state of mourning will subside, we also know we shall remain inconsolable . . . the gap . . . remains something else. And actually this is how it should be. It is the only way of perpetuating that love which we do not want to relinquish" (Freud qtd. in Clewell 61-62). Such "endless mourning," for Freud, means sustaining one's "love" for the lost other, continually responding to her difference even after her death (Clewell 65; Freud qtd. in Clewell 62). This kind of mourning "condition[s]" the ego's very "existence," giving it "an elegiac formation" (Clewell 65, 64). Despite the "inconsolable" tenor of such unending grief, the mourner's "sorrow" may be partially alleviated by a sense that she sustains her relationship to the lost other, even if she refuses to idealize the lost loved one ("Console").

Spargo suggests that consolation may coincide with endless mourning. He admits, "Any elegy's turn against grief may eventually be put in the service of its own consolatory purposes," although "such turns" remain "revisionary" in that they resist "the history of consolation and the strategies of commemoration . . ." (Spargo, *Ethics* 128). Anti-elegiac, anti-consolatory dissent resides in "a set of dialectical resistances embedded in the elegiac genre" (Spargo, *Ethics* 129). The elegy, therefore, seems to assume a "dialectical" form based on "the existence or working of opposing forces" or "tendencies" within the genre (Spargo, *Ethics* 129; "Dialectic"). Such oppositional tensions seem to coincide with DesPrez's description of the "dialogic structure" of mourning in some of Frost's poems, such as "Home Burial," in which different mourners address each other (32). Spargo and DesPrez indicate that dialogic mourning may be more ethical than substitutive or compensatory mourning because dialogic mourning is unresolved and therefore continues to respond ethically to the other's alterity.

In this chapter, I analyze three poems—John Donne's "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning," John Keats's "This Living Hand," and Christina Rossetti's "Remember"—that, through both elegiac and anti-elegiac means, appeal to readers' value of dialogic connections with others. I suggest that this appeal does function as a kind of consoling aesthetic pleasure—but that this kind of consolation is deferred or redirected away from substitution for the other that ends mourning. I view these poems rhetorically, considering how they stage speaker-listener dialogues that, in turn, allow the reader to engage dialogically with the poem itself. This dialogic effect consoles by affirm the

reader's subjective ability "*to be able*" and her capacity for responsibility to and for others (Levinas, "Time" 42).

Indeed, the appeal to our value of dialogic connections seems deep and abiding; in light of thinkers as diverse as Freud and Levinas, it may appeal to the very structure of our humanity. As Clewell explains, Freud later described "the ego as" having "an elegiac formation," which Levinas echoes in his account of the trauma of the subject's responsibility to and for the other, responsibility that conditions the subject's existence as such (Clewell 64). In "Substitution," Levinas explains, that the subject is one who "is affected by the other," and therefore "is an anarchic trauma, or an inspiration of the one by the other" through her responsibility to and for the other (113).[13] By appealing to our fundamental capacity to respond mournfully and ethically toward others, these poems may offer an indirect, ethical form of consolation that is not antithetical to grief. I aim to show how consolation and grief—along with a range of other emotions—may be mutually present. Recognizing the interconnectedness of these emotions may reconcile the apparent conflict between our sympathy with—and identification as—mourners and our concern for responding ethically to the loss of loved ones. In dialogue, we may respond ethically to the other in ways that sustain the "love" for lost others "that we do not want to relinquish" (Freud qtd. in Clewell 61-62). Past relationships may enduringly

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13. In "Substitution," Levinas explains that the subject is responsible for the Other's responsibility; prior to all intention and action, the subject is "accused of what the others do or suffer, or responsible for what they do or suffer" (101). Because the subject is "under accusation by everyone," she "is a hostage" (Levinas, "Substitution" 101). Levinas describes the condition of being responsible for the other, of being a hostage to the other's responsibility, "the passivity of a trauma," which suggests that because a "subject is a hostage," she therefore abides in a condition of trauma ("Substitution" 100).

shape our present relationships, and I suggest that such ongoing dialogue, in which we respond ethically both to present and to past others, may afford ethical consolation, even in the midst of mourning.

Self as Loss of the Other

Although Freud and Levinas offer very different accounts of loss, they both suggest that loss of the other defines and conditions the self. In psychological terms, Freud indicates, "During the early stage of human development, the infant negotiates the loss of or separation from a primary love object by identifying with the lost other" (Clewell 61). This loss precedes the separation of the id, ego, and superego, such that "[i]dentification thus becomes the condition for constituting the self . . ." (Clewell 61). The lost other permanently ruptures the cohesive self through identification. This process of "ego formation" is also a "mourning" process, as Clewell recognizes, implying that subjectivity originates—and endures—in grief (64). As Clewell concludes, Freud demonstrates that "ambivalence" is "an effect of the very separation between self and other . . . the product of bereaved internalization" of the other through identification (65). This lasting ambivalence "creates and frustrates a desire for fusion or unity of selfhood," evoking a mournful attitude that exceeds any specific loss (Clewell 65). Therefore, "the mourning subject may affirm the endurance of ambivalent bonds to . . . loved and lost others as a condition of its own existence" (Clewell 65). The self retains an "elegiac formation," forever sundered by and oriented toward the other, for whom she indefinitely mourns (Clewell 64).

Levinas seems to provide ethical terms for a similarly sundered, mournful subjectivity permanently oriented toward the other. For Levinas, the potential loss of the other is implied by the self's very presence, which always risks lethally displacing the other. Levinas explains, "One has to speak, to say *I*, in order to be in the first person, precisely to be me . . ." but this saying I, already implies an audience, an other who "calls for me" ("Ethics" 83). Because my very presence risks lethally displacing this other, the other's "death calls me into question, as if . . . I had become the accomplice of the death to which the other . . . is exposed . . . as if I had to answer for the other's death even before *being*" ("Ethics" 83). The loss of the other thus conditions the self's very presence as a subject; the other's death makes the subject's presence possible because her death is never a valueless absence, but rather always valued as a loss even before the subject emerges. The threat that the self's very presence poses to the other makes the self responsible for the other "prior to any free commitment," intention, consciousness, or will (Levinas, "Substitution" 99). As Levinas emphasizes in "Substitution," such responsibility "goes against intentionality, such that responsibility for others could never mean altruistic will, instinct of 'natural benevolence,' or love" because the subject is responsible prior to her ability to intend, to act intentionally, or even to care (99, 101).

This responsibility is a capacity so prior to consciousness that "[i]t is the passivity of trauma . . . the passivity of being persecuted," such that "[a] subject is a hostage" ("Substitution" 100-101). As Jeannine Thyreen-Mizingou observes, "For Lévinas, only the suffering servant is the true human" (81). Levinas views his account of subjectivity as challenging "the whole history of Western philosophy['s]" privileging of

ontology as grounded in humanity's knowledge and consciousness, and as assuming the priority of the self (her consciousness, knowledge, experience) such that relationships with others follow from the self's initial presence ("Ethics" 77). Levinas inverts this conventional priority of the self by arguing that the other precedes the self. In this sense, one's responsibility for the other seems to imply the loss of the kind of self that philosophy has historically prioritized, a loss of the fundamental consciousness and intentional rationality that Western philosophy grants the subject (Levinas, "Substitution" 89). Levinas, however, does not view this priority of the other as a loss of the self; for him, one's inability to "evade" one's capacity for responsibility is precisely the origin of one's "uniqueness" ("Substitution" 101). Levinas seems to concur with Freud that the subject retains an elegiac formation in which mourning conditions her very presence. In "Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge," Levinas claims, "Responsibility, in the etymological sense of the term . . . is what is meant by *dialogue*" (67). Together, Freud and Levinas affirm the subject's mournful structure, which, for Levinas, defines her ethical—responsible and dialogic—nature.

In *Counter-Statement*, Burke defines "a capacity to function in a certain way" as "an obligation so to function," even "a command to act in a certain way" (155, 142). Burke's definition suggests that the Levinasian capacity for responsibility obliges us "to function" or to act responsibly (*Counter-Statement* 155). This obligatory aspect of Levinasian responsibility is evident in its extreme "passivity"—responsibility is "prior to the passivity-activity alternative," and, because the self "does not evade it," she is "persecuted" and held "a hostage for the others," whom her presence threatens to

displace ("Substitution" 110, 101, 100, 116). Although such a passive capacity precedes action, it nonetheless shapes action; Burke explains, "if a dog lacks a bone, he will gnaw at a block of wood; not that he is hungry—for he may have his fill of meat—but his teeth, in their fitness to endure the strain of gnawing, feel the need of enduring that strain" (*Counter-Statement* 142). We might infer, however, that when a dog does "gnaw" at "meat" to satisfy his hunger, this gnawing fulfills his capacity for gnawing more fully (Burke, *Counter-Statement* 142). Burke compares this example to the "formal aspects of art in that they exercise formal potentialities of the reader. They enable the mind to follow processes amendable to it" (*Counter-Statement* 142-143). Art and poetry "exercise" or actualize some of our "potentialities" or capacities, including our capacity for responsible dialogue *(Counter-Statement* 142-43).

There may be any number of ways of actualizing our capacity for responsibility—some of them may even be immoral at the level of action or politics—but all our actions may be constrained or affected by this capacity in some way. Keats's "This Living Hand" represents one way in which a speaker invokes an immoral relationship with his listener by demanding that the listener exchange her life for his. Although this demand may well seem distasteful if not altogether immoral to us, I hope to show how even such gruesome requests can engage our capacity for responsibility. Despite the speaker's immoral demand of his listener, according to Levinas's account of ethics, the speaker's subjectivity would still be conditioned by his ethical relationship to the other—he would still retain a capacity for responsibility, even if he failed to actualize that capacity by acting immorally toward his listener. The pleasure of actualizing our

capacity for responsibility, however, may increase depending on the degree to which such actualization is responsible, ethical.

Our actualizations of our capacities may bring us pleasure in part because they turn on imitation or mimesis. As Aristotle explains in his "Poetics," "it is an instinct of human beings . . . to engage in mimesis . . . and equally natural that everyone enjoys mimetic objects," suggesting that imitation has a universal appeal (37). Actualizing a capacity like responsibility may bring us pleasure simply because our actions imitate that capacity; our actions repeat or reflect our "formal potentialities," even as our actions exceed mere form (Burke, *Counter-Statement* 142). Our actions may even teach us something about these potentialities, of which we may remain unaware until our actions bring them to our attention. In this respect, the pleasure we find in our actions' imitations of our capacities may also coincide with the pleasure of learning. Aristotle characterizes imitation as a heuristic, observing that we develop our "earliest understanding" through mimesis or imitation ("Poetics" 37).

I suggest that the more closely our actions imitate our capacity for responsibility, the greater pleasure we may take in them. For example, although an ethics of care is not radical enough for the kind of responsibility that Levinas positions prior to care and emotion, an ethics of care may seem especially appealing in part because it aligns so closely with our capacity to respond protectively, caringly to the other. Responsibility and imitation reflect the essentially relational—responsive—nature of personhood. In Levinas's words, "The other is in me and in the midst of my very identification," in the trauma that the other's potential death inflicts on my very presence, such that "from the

start, the other affects us despite ourselves" ("Substitution" 114, 118). Poetry, especially elegiac poetry, may bring this relational nature of personhood to our attention—may remind us of our capacity for responsibility—and, perhaps, thereby increases our abilities both to care and to enjoy.

Anti-elegiac Attenuations of Loss

Donne, Keats, and Rossetti all seem to challenge conventional conceptions of elegiac grief. Donne's "Valediction" prohibits grief as the speaker persuades the listener that they share a cerebral, spiritual connection that will endure temporary physical separation. Keats's speaker seems to curse his listener, threatening to "haunt" her after his death until she wishes she too were dead so that her "conscience" would be "calmed" (4, 7). Like Donne, Rossetti also offers "an accomplished and justly famous valediction forbidding mourning," as Jan Marsh recognizes in the speaker's request that the listener "Remember" her after death—unless remembering makes him "sad," in which case it would be "[b]etter" that he "forget and smile" (Marsh 100; Rossetti 1, 14, 13). All three poems seem to argue against mourning, although Donne's and Rossetti's speakers refuse to let their listeners mourn for them while Keats's speaker refuses to mourn for his listener.

We may associate these prohibitions of mourning and premature grieving for one's own death with Spargo's criteria of "anti-elegiac resistance to the idealist norms of the traditional elegy . . ." (*Ethics* 129). For example, Spargo deems "belatedness . . . a mourning that begins after other survivors have already mourned" and includes a mourner whose "noncooperation . . . mark[s] him as someone who is, if only

accidentally, out of step with the rhythm of his society and its forgetful flow toward the future," not unlike Dickinson's and Frost's isolated speakers (*Ethics* 129). Donne's and Rossetti's prohibitions against mourning also seem to resist conventional elegiac grief, reflecting their speakers' "noncooperation . . . with society" and its conventions of mourning (Spargo, *Ethics* 129). So too does Keats's speaker's anxiety about his own death and his malicious threat to the listener "mark him as someone who is . . . out of step with . . ." norms of grief (Spargo, *Ethics* 129). These poems likewise reflect Spargo's last two anti-elegiac criteria—"the remembrance of failed intimacy . . . and the ambivalent wish for reciprocity . . ." (*Ethics* 129). For example, Avi Erlich and Margaret Reynolds read Donne's "Forbidding Mourning" and Rossetti's "Remember" respectively against the grain. Erlich emphasizes Donne's "ambivalent feeling, concluding that "he both loves and hates the woman to whom he is speaking" (361-62). Reynolds offers a "subversive" interpretation of Rossetti's poem, demonstrating the speaker's dissatisfaction with her oppressively "dominant" listener (34). From Reynolds's perspective, Rossetti's speaker seems to mourn her "failed intimacy" with her listener, and, given the "curse-" like message of this interpretation, the speaker may express an "ambivalent" or even malicious "wish for reciprocity" with her listener, much like Keats (Spargo, *Ethics* 129; Reynolds 34). On closer examination, these poems seem both to fulfill and to extend Spargo's anti-elegiac criteria, challenging conventional elegiac grief.

All of these poems also appeal to readers' value of dialogic connection with others, even by showing how those connections may be dangerously inescapable, as Keats and Rossetti indicate. These poems emphasize memory as an essential means of

preserving relationships, even when such preservation may be painful. This pain, these poems suggest, may be part of subjectivity to the extent that subjectivity is rooted in a responsible relationship to and for the other. They evoke emotions and dialogic experience that remind us of how our ability "*to be able*" informs our Levinasian capacity for responsible dialogue (Levinas, "Time" 42).

Personal and Poetic Encounters with Loss

Each of these poets, much like Dickinson and Frost, had their share, if not more, of loss. I note some of their encounters with loss here not to argue that any of these poems necessarily represents a poet's direct response to a particular event or person, but rather to suggest that their familiarity with loss likely shaped their poetic imaginations. Like John Carey's investigation into "the structure of [Donne's] imagination" via biographical considerations, I suggest that these poets' actual experiences of loss may likely have shaped, at least indirectly, the ways in which they imagined fictive losses (10). To that extent, we may view these poems as responding at least indirectly to their authors' encounters with loss.

In her article "Reading [Out] Biography in 'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning,'" Judith Scherer Herz calls into question the biographical exigence for Donne's poem. This exigence has been promoted by Izaak Walton's claim "that this poem was written to Donne's wife when Donne went to the Continent in 1611," which is endorsed in a footnote in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* (Ferguson, Salter, and Stallworthy 275). Walton's account has enduringly shaped interpretations of Donne's poem, as Herz acknowledges: "To a certain degree all readings of the poem have to

position themselves in relation to this narrative" of Walton's whether they "reject it" or not based on the kind of evidence she uses to convincingly undermine Walton's credibility (138).

Despite the uncertainty about whether Donne wrote the poem for his wife, Herz affirms that Donne was separated from his wife for months during his journey between 1611 and 1612, and that "his child died two months . . . after his departure" (137-38). Donne may have felt his departure to be less of a loss and more of a welcome reprieve, as John Carey clarifies, from the pressures of poverty and of a fast-growing family—increasing at a rate of "one child per year"—cramped in a country cottage made traveling a welcome reprieve from the isolation and responsibility of family life (73). So overwhelmed by family obligations and "cut off from the civilized world in the country," Donne "became depressed and ill, and was tempted at times to do away with himself," according to Carey (73). Given Donne's depressive, suicidal feelings, "[a] death in the family would, in a sense, have been a relief, if it were not for the funeral expenses involved" (Carey 73). His family's dismal economic situation must have been quite grim indeed for the ambitious Donne, who coveted a "public career" (Carey 71).

Donne's career prospects were abruptly cut short when his benefactor, Sir Thomas Egerton, discovered Donne's "secret marriage" to Ann More in 1601 (Carey 71). Donne escaped to Europe for twelve months from 1605-1606, and again to the Continent on a nine-month trip from 1611-1612 (75-76). The familial losses were likely eclipsed by the even more dire circumstances of his family's poverty and isolation. In light of this context, it seems quite plausible that Donne might contemplate the kind of "ambivalent

feeling" that Erlich reads in the speaker of "Forbidding Mourning," a speaker who "both loves and hates the woman to whom he is speaking" (361-62). This apparent de-valuation of the death of his child and his separation from his wife may seem to us to be a kind of loss in and of itself—a loss of an ability to appreciate fully the presences of these individuals.

According to Carey, loss defines Donne's poetic and philosophical attitudes: "a sense of separation, together with a desire to overcome it, are contending and controlling features in Donne's thought all his life" (61). We may recognize the "divisive influence" of these "features" in the contrast between "Forbidding Mourning's" emphasis on "union" and Donne's denial "of the possibility of any such union" in poems like "Love's Alchymie" –although Erlich invites us to recognize the tension between both features in "Forbidding Mourning" (Carey 61). Carey locates the origins for Donne's affinity for the conflict between union and separation in the gruesome conflicts between the Anglican and Catholic churches that culminated during Donne's childhood. Carey's first chapter details the political persecution of Catholics in Anglican England, who had severely limited civil rights and were subject to fines, torture, and execution for disobeying "anti-Catholic legislation" that dominated late-sixteenth-century England (16). Carey concludes that, as a member of a prominent Catholic family, "Donne was born into terror, and formed by it" (18).

Although Donne ultimately rejected his Catholic faith, Carey emphasizes Donne's liminal position between a Catholic community that "had claimed his earliest allegiance" and "the body politic" to which he struggled to belong (61). Religious strife

dominated Donne's childhood, and in combination with the death of his father when he was four years old, may have contributed to Donne's "profound anxiety about the permanence of human relationships"—anxiety that may have exacerbated his stress about his own family later on (Carey 15, 37). Donne's keen sense of loss also seems to inform "Forbidding Mourning" in that, as Matthias Bauer argues, "the language of the poem . . . reflects and realizes its theme of unity-in-separation" (97). Insofar as "Forbidding Mourning" strives to overcome separation, it seems both to respond to loss and to aim for identification, the kind of connection so important in Burke's rhetorical theory. Donne's representations of unity and separation clarify why connections with others may seem especially valuable in situations of loss.

In *Christina Rossetti: A Writer's Life*, Jan Marsh calls "Remember" "an accomplished and justly famous valediction forbidding mourning," associating Rossetti's poem with Donne's (100). Marsh explains that Rossetti wrote "Remember" in July of 1849 after a bout of "anxiety" during the preceding spring (99). Although Rossetti's "anxiety" was attributed to "no specific ailment," by June of 1849, "she was 'so sick she could not even write out her own poems'" (Marsh 99-100). Marsh explains that in her early adolescence, Rossetti suffered a breakdown, after which her vivacious childhood personality turned permanently melancholic. According to Marsh, Rossetti enjoyed an "exceptionally happy and companionable" childhood, surrounded by three older siblings, an uncommonly "affectionate" father, and an attentive mother who oversaw the children's early education (24, 17, 22, 18). In 1842, however, when Rossetti was only twelve, her father's health rapidly declined (Marsh 38). By "1843, he suffered a crisis so

serious and painful that he expected to die," and his severe illness turned the Rossettis' "cheerful and sociable home" into "a place of sickness and worry"—a "transformation" Marsh calls "catastrophic" (39).

Since Rossetti's father was the family's breadwinner, his incapacitating illness threw the "[f]amily finances . . . into an acute state," and Rossetti's mother and sister had to take jobs as governesses—although her brothers stayed away at school (Marsh 42). Rossetti was left at home to tend to her father, who, once "confident" and "energetic," was now "a depressed and ailing invalid" (Marsh 43). Marsh suggests that, while Rossetti may have seemed to have "no legitimate reason to complain," she was nonetheless bereft of the companionship of her mother, brothers, and sister in the face of her father's daily "sufferings" (Marsh 43). Indeed, her family's trials "overshadowed and eclipsed Christina's own needs," and poetry became "an invaluable emotional" outlet for venting feelings too indecorous for other expression.

Although no clear record documents the specific nature of Rossetti's adolescent trauma, Marsh thoroughly addresses the existing facts, which include Rossetti's "self-mutilating gestures" like furiously slicing her arm open with a pair of scissors in response to her mother's chastisement (50). Rossetti's emotional anguish was "accompanied by physical symptoms not easy to diagnose," but the signs point toward "hysteria and depression" (Marsh 50). Marsh poignantly concludes, "At the age of fourteen [Rossetti] was suffering a severe nervous breakdown, just eighteen months after her father's collapse" (51). Although Rossetti's health did eventually improve, her personality never returned to its youthful exuberance, and she would continue to

experience bouts of malaise and anxiety, such as the one in 1849. The enigmatic nature of Rossetti's afflictions resonates to some degree with the "mysterious fright" that "haunted" Emily Dickinson and inspired a slew of poems she wrote around 1862, including "After great pain" (Manley 260). Personal loss seems to inform both Dickinson's "After great pain" and Rossetti's "Remember."

The life of John Keats, however, may arguably be most marked by loss. The eldest of four surviving siblings, Keats was born in 1795, followed by his brothers, George and Tom, and by his brother Edward, who died in infancy when Keats was six (Bate 1, 8). Otherwise, like Rossetti's early home, the Keats' "household seems to have been an affectionate one" at first, according to Bate (8). When Keats was eight, he and his brother George were sent to a "small academy in Enfield" not far from their home, which was run by the kindly headmaster, John Clarke (Bate 9). Only a few months after the boys left home, however, their father died in a riding accident ("his horse slipped . . . and in the accident his skull was fractured") on his way home from visiting his sons at school (Bate 12). Mrs. Keats, perhaps overwhelmed with the responsibility of managing the stables that provided the family's income, impetuously remarried less than three months after her husband's death (Bate 13). Mrs. Keats's parents "immediately took responsibility for the children," who promptly went to live with their grandparents (Bate 13). Susan Wolfson notes that Keats's mother was "apparently unhappy[y]" in her new marriage, "for she disappeared soon afterwards, not returning until 1807 . . ." (75). Almost a year after Keats's father passed away, Keats's grandfather died, and, due to his

poorly-written will, Keats and his siblings were left with little financial support (Bate 13-14).

After their mother finally returned, she fell ill with consumption (Bate 20). When the boys were home for their Christmas break, Keats was "[j]olted into a sudden sense of responsibility" that appears remarkably Levinasian in its selflessness—"he sat up with his mother . . . for nights on end," cooking for her, "reading to her, and standing guard by her door as she slept" (Bate 21; Wolfson 75). Not realizing the extent of her illness, Keats and his brothers returned to school—but their mother died only a few months later in March 1810, when Keats was only fourteen (21). Bate observes, "Death could perhaps be taken more for granted by a child at that time than it is now," an observation that seems applicable to Donne's and Rossetti's circumstance as well (21). Keats's response to his mother's death, however, affirms that the loss of a family member can be traumatic, even when death is commonplace. Bate concludes that Keats "froze into reticence before calamity"; once a courageous fighter who would defend his brother and friends at school, after his mother's death, Keats curled up in "'a nook under the master's desk' in the schoolroom at Enfield," clearly overwhelmed by an "'impassioned and prolonged' sense of loss" (20-21). Enduring more than his fair share of loss, Keats affirms that loss may be felt deeply and poignantly even in situations where it may seem less significant to outsiders. Keats's experiences invite us to consider that the losses in Rossetti's and Donne's lives may have also left enduring marks on these poets, even if, especially in Donne's case, their grief seemed unvoiced. We are invited to consider that some

mournful expressions may differ from our initial assumptions about what counts as legitimate grief.

Several other significant losses were to plague Keats, however, before he wrote "This Living Hand," which both Bate and *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* indicate he did in 1819. Eventually, Keats shared responsibility with his brother George for nursing Tom, who suffered from tuberculosis for many months and finally passed away on December 1, 1818, at age nineteen under Keats's care (Bate 386). Keats himself had had bouts of ill health—especially sore throats and toothaches—for awhile, and Bate concludes that Keats likely "had caught tuberculosis of the lungs" before Tom's death, "and that it began moving into an active stage by early September, 1819" (616). Brooke Hopkins points out the relevance of Keats's apprenticeship to a surgeon in reading implications of "dismemberment" in "This Living Hand" (31). Bate explains that Keats worked at this apprenticeship for four years, from the time he left school at age fifteen until he began studies at Guy's Hospital to earn a license to practice as a surgeon and an apothecary himself (30, 43). At the hospital, Keats worked as a dresser, accompanying surgeons on their rounds and changing patients' bandages (Bate 48). He undoubtedly witnessed some intense physical suffering, given that there were no anesthetics at the time (Bate 48). Bate includes a description of the typical scene: "the patient held down, often screaming with pain; the pupils packed in the operating theater . . . the surgeon with hardly room to operate" (48). Such intimate exposure to physical suffering likely informed an imagination capable of crafting the gruesomely physical curse in "This Living Hand." This biographical context, especially the decline in his brother's and his

own health, suggests that the kind of aggression expressed in "This Living Hand" may also constitute a mode of mourning.

Donne

In "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning," Donne's speaker affirms his dialogic relationship with his listener by recasting absence as presence, persuading the listener not to mourn by appealing to her—and the reader's—value of connection. The title of the poem declares it a response to loss in that a valediction is "a departure speech or discourse, a bidding of farewell" (Ferguson, Salter, and Stallworthy 275). In this sense, the poem functions as a kind of epideictic rhetoric since the occasion of departure or separation serves as its exigence. Like epideictic rhetoric, the poem is addressed to an audience whom the speaker directly addresses and, thus, with whom he converses. While a departure may rightly seem less extreme and therefore less of a loss than the death of a loved one, this exigence is nonetheless similar to the elegiac exigence of death since both involve physical separation. Such separation is also the exigence for rhetorical identification, as Kenneth Burke explains in *A Rhetoric of Motives*. In a sense, Donne's poem presents itself as a solution or cure for mourning and grief. The speaker urges "let us melt and make no noise,/No tear-floods, nor sigh tempests move," explicitly prohibiting conventional expressions of grief (Donne 5-6).

The speaker recasts their separation as connection, claiming that, unlike "sublunary lovers," who "cannot admit/Absence," he and his listener share "a love so much refined" that it is itself partially elusive and absent because they themselves "know not what it is" (Donne 13-15). This love makes the speaker and his listener "Inter-

assurèd of the mind" (Donne 19). The Oxford English Dictionary explains that the prefix *inter* signifies "between, among, amid, in between, in the midst'," words that all connote connection between individual parties ("Inter"). The speaker's connection with the listener is "assured" or secure in and/or because of "the mind," because of non-physical—emotional, psychological, intellectual—connections that seem almost to require physical separation (Donne 19). This phrase connotes dialogue, which is a significant way in which individual people, necessarily separated by their physical bodies, are connected. Dialogue, whether written or spoken, is also a primary means by which we cultivate emotional, psychological, and intellectual connections with others. According to Matthias Bauer's reading of this line, "The assurance of a common language, which may even be unconscious to the lovers themselves ('our selves know not what it is,' 18), warrants their hope of a final reunion" (108). Dialogue and language preserve the possibility for the lovers' future reunion.

The speaker's "mind" also allows him to craft poetic metaphors that continue his poetic dialogue with his listener and that re-cast their physical separation as an emotional and/or spiritual connection (Donne 19). He emphasizes their connection, claiming that his and his listener's souls are in fact "one" (Donne 21). He explicitly re-names the "breach" of their physical separation "an expansion," renaming the absence/loss of connection as presence (Donne 23-24). The famous image of the "twin compasses" likewise emphasizes the lovers' connection; even if they are "two" separated entities, they "move" together and are thereby connected (Donne 26-27). Their ability to move together, however, depends on their "separation;" as Anne Barbeau Gardiner points out,

"The temporal separation at the lower compass feet is even necessary to make the artistic or mathematical design" that simultaneously reflects the compasses' connection (120). Donne's trope of using motion as a ground for identifying the speaker and the listener seems to coincide closely with Burke's emphasis on attitudes and actions as grounds of identifying two people. Actions, as a kind of motion, and the attitudes that give rise to them are abstract, non-physical means of connecting, and, as such, are quite similar to dialogue. Donne's closing lines, "Thy firmness makes my circle just/And makes me end where I begun," equate the beginning of the speaker's journey with its end, suggesting that the journey results in no actual separation or loss (35-36).

The term "just" not only connotes a perfect circle, for which the beginning cannot be distinguished from the end, but also connotes an ethical or moral connection emphasizing that the lovers should be so connected to each other (Donne 35). In this respect, the image of the "twin compasses" seems to coincide with Levinas's sense of the ethical subject as one who is inseparable from the other, to and for whom she is responsible. Indeed, the compasses seem to respond to each other as "the fixed foot . . . move[s] . . . if th' other do" and "leans and hearkens after" its "roam[ing]" companion, drawing the wanderer "home" (Donne 27-32). While Donne uses the term "hearkens" metaphorically when applying it to the compasses, this term's denotative meaning of listening implies a dialogic situation, lending Donne's metaphor a dialogic emphasis (Donne 31). The dialogic connections shared by the compasses parallel the dialogic connection that the poem enables between the speaker and his listener. Such connections, however, turn on the absence of complete physical connection. Donne's

speaker persuades his listener to view physical separation not as a loss or absence, but rather as the presence of dialogic connection. This abstract, dialogic connection may coincide with Bauer's treatment of "the spiritualization of love" in Donne's poem (104).

Donne invites his reader to sympathize and/or identify with the speaker's and listener's desires to be remain connected to each other despite physical separation. Whether or not the reader cares much about being connected to this particular speaker or listener, the reader may enjoy or take comfort in Donne's assurance that enduring, dialogic connections do exist—and that the reader may potentially participate in them. By directing the reader's attention to connections across time and space, Donne self-reflexively reminds his reader that, in reading the poem itself, she participates in such an enduring, dialogic connection with the poet. The poem invokes or performs the kind of dialogic relationship that it describes. The poem not only affirms the speaker-listener connection by describing it, but also allows the listener/reader to re-invoke or perform that relationship through the act of reading the poem. The acts of reading and writing the poem—and the effect of participating in a dialogic, non-physical relationship—may have been especially consoling to Donne himself, who about the time he wrote this poem was far from his struggling family coping with his child's death (*RM* 38).

While the listener may be especially consoled by the poem that allows her to reconnect with the speaker, Donne's reader may enjoy or be consoled by poetry's power to have such a dialogic effect. This consolation, however, does not turn on poetic substitution for the distant speaker or separated relationship, but rather arises from the listener's ability to continue participating in the very relationship that she would mourn if

it were lost. The poem also does not function as a substitute for a mournful reader; rather, it encourages Donne's reader to change her attitudes about relationships in her own life by suggesting that relationships may endure separation via poetry, dialogue, and language in general. If we see the poem's value of dialogic relationships coinciding with Levinasian responsibility, then we may find that the poem's pleasing and consoling effects are enhanced by the reader's actualization of this Levinasian capacity in reading the poem. This pleasure does not seem to preclude the possibility of mourning altogether; the listener and reader might still mourn the distant speaker—and separated relationships in general—although their grief might be attenuated by the hope that such separation and loss may be overcome with responsible dialogue and poetry.

This meta-poetic appeal to dialogic connections is reinforced by Donne's use of paronomasia celata, which Bauer delineates in his characterization of Donne's poem as a tour-de-force in crafting connections. The concept of paronomasia celata denotes indirect connections by linking synonyms between different languages (in Donne's case, Latin and English) via similar sounds, such as the connotations that emerge between Donne's use of "breath" and its various Latin translations: *spiritus*, *anima*, and *aura* (Bauer 100, 104; Donne 4). For example, paronomasia celata emphasizes on a formal level Donne's thematic portrayal of one breath an ambiguous marker between life and death (Bauer 104). Donne describes "friends['] contrasting conclusions about whether their dying companion has actually passed away: some claim "Now" their dying companion's "breath goes," while other friends "say, 'No'" (3-4). The ambiguity of "breath" is enhanced on a formal level through paronomasia celata. Breath connotes

"soul," morning, mourning, life and death when we interpret the word in terms of its Latin translations (Bauer 104). The word "breath" could be translated into Latin as "*spiritus*," which is a synonym of "*anima*," meaning "soul"—a term which, especially for a Christian audience, connotes a connection between life and death (Bauer 104).

Breath could also be translated as "*aura*," which sounds similar to "*aurora* . . . a metonym (and Latin synonym) of morning" (Bauer 104). This implication of "morning" connotes renewal, vitality, and life. Morning is also a homophone of "mourning," which connotes loss and death, reiterating the theme of death in Donne's first stanza and the elegiac implications of the title. Bauer explains how these English-Latin connections relate the first stanza to the poem's title: "The breath or spirit of the dying man is thus . . . connected with the 'forbidding mo[u]rning" (104). The homophonic play on morning/mourning illustrates how "morning" forbids "mourning." According to Bauer, "the light of morning, traditionally regarded as a sign of resurrection and the coming of Christ, is what truly forbids mourning" (104). The poem's aim to forbid mourning is thus articulated in the connotations of "breath" illuminated through its translation into Latin. Bauer adds that because "*aurora*" is the bride in the Song of Songs, this term also enhances the theme of "the spiritualization of love" (104).[14]

When we attend to the implications of translating the English term "breath" into Latin, we may uncover a host of connotations that emphasize the poem's attempt to forbid mourning by emphasizing the endurance of spiritual love. Because paronomasia celata turns on connections between separate languages, this trope embodies the kind of

14. Bauer goes on to associate "aurora" with "aura," meaning gold in Latin, a connotation that he ties to Donne's line "like gold to aery thinness beat" (24).

connection across distance that Donne's speaker explicitly emphasizes. Bauer finds Donne invoking "a linguistic bridge between the different fields of imagery which follow upon each other in the poem," even while they may initially appear quite "incoherent" (103). Bauer argues that "the language of the poem . . . reflects and realizes its theme of unity-in-separation" (97). This theme is emphasized through paronomasia celata, which connects English and Latin and thereby formally parallels Donne's speaker's attempts to create spiritual connections with his listener despite their physical separation. Donne's use of paronomasia celata invites readers to recognize connections between Latin and English—and then to identify those connections with the ones that Donne's speaker tries to invoke. Donne invites his readers to perform the same process of connecting as his speaker, prompting his readers to identify with his speaker and connect more closely to the poem. For the implied listener with whom the speaker supposedly wants to connect, paronomasia celata becomes one more way of identifying with—and connecting to—her lover.

Bauer's emphasis on appeals to connection in "Forbidding Mourning" contrasts sharply with Avi Erlich's psychoanalytic reading of the speaker's ambivalence towards the listener. For example, Erlich suggests that "the speaker forbids mourning" not to protect his listener from painful loss, as our previous reading implies, but rather "because he wants to protect his noble love from cheap self-advertisements and because he is actually glad to go" (363). Erlich invites us to reconsider conventional assumptions about Donne's motives in writing "Forbidding Mourning." As Herz observes, "all readings of the poem have to position themselves in relation to [the] narrative" promoted

by Izaak Walton that Donne wrote the poem for his wife when he traveled to the Continent in 1611 (Ferguson, Salter, and Stallworthy 275). Erlich's suggestion that the Donne's speaker is happy to leave the listener urges us to consider that Donne may have been relieved to escape the pressures of a rapidly growing family burdened by poverty. To consider how Erlich's critique of the speaker may illuminate Donne's motives for writing affirms how enigmatic authors' motives remain to readers and even to themselves, especially since motives for writing can be as ambiguous and conflicted as the ambivalent motives that Elrich recognizes in Donne's speaker. Erlich's reading still reflects the poem's orientation toward loss and absence, albeit Erlich suggests that, for the speaker, the absence of connection with the listener is, in fact, desirable. Perhaps the speaker himself does truly want to leave the listener, as if he desires her absence. The explicit argument, in the poem, however, emphasizes the speaker's aim to console the listener, to prevent her from mourning.

Perhaps such contrasting motives may coexist in Donne's poem, coinciding with Spargo's anti-elegiac convention of "the ambivalent wish for reciprocity" as well as the "ambivalence" that, for Freud, constitutes the subject as mournful (Spargo, *Ethics* 129; Clewell 65). Such ambivalence may itself may coincide with Levinasian responsibility since, according to Freud, ambivalence results from "the very separation between self and other," and permanently ruptures the self, who is "inhabited by otherness as a condition of [her] own subjectivity" (Clewell 65). In Levinasian terms, the self responds to the other "as a condition of . . . subjectivity" (Clewell 65). The speaker's ambivalence may be a sign of the speaker's a responsible, mournful subjectivity. The contrast between

interpreting the speaker as genuinely sad about leaving the listener and interpreting him as happy to leave her may also speak to the poem's dialogic form. A dialogic relationship may exist between these two contrasting interpretations, which may situate the reader as negotiating this dialogic contrast. This effect would likewise enhance the poem's appeal to dialogue.

However we interpret the speaker's motives, Donne's reader may find pleasure in the poetic connections the poem makes. Even if the speaker feels ambivalent towards his listener, he still appeals to his audience's value of connection through poetic connections, like the abab rhyme scheme in the first stanza and the metaphorical connection that identifies the speaker-listener relationship with the "gold" wire and the "twin compasses" (Donne 24, 26). This value seems to underlie the appeal of poetry in general. One of lyric poetry's unique pleasures is that it uses similarities in rhymes, rhythms, sounds, and meanings to connect disparate words and ideas. These artistic connections in turn create a connection between the poet and her reader. Perhaps Donne's fascination with unity and separation motivated, at least in part, his treatment of the appeal of connection in "Forbidding Mourning." In light of the tour-de-force of poetic and linguistic connections that Donne wrought in this poem, whatever his true feelings for his wife may have been, Donne seems to recognize how well-suited a leave-taking would be for a poem that interrogated the possibilities for poetic connections, including connections between the poem and its contexts. Donne's emphasis on connection seems to affirm that poetry and dialogue may be successful ways of attenuating loss.

Keats

While Donne seems to aim to comfort his reader, even if such comfort is merely a mask of more ambivalent, less caring feelings towards his audience(s), Keats quite differently aims to torment his reader. Like Donne, Keats directly addresses his reader and describes the speaker-listener relationship that the poem invokes (i.e. "This living hand . . . would, if it were . . . in the icy silence of the tomb,/So haunt they days . . .") (Keats 1-4). Unlike Donne's poem, in which the listener is comforted by her connection and cooperation with the speaker despite physical separation, Keats's poem only comforts the listener by releasing her from the terror of the speaker's haunting presence. In Keats's scene, the listener is one who survives the speaker's death, only to "wish" herself dead so that he might live "again"—and her "conscience" finally be "calmed" (5-7). The listener is asked to reciprocate the poem addressed to her by giving her life, and, thus, attain the pleasure of a calm "conscience" (Keats 7). Keats emphasizes reciprocity—and its dependence on loss—in contrast to Donne's emphasis of continual connection, like the "expansion" of a "gold" wire (23).

Such reciprocity turns on loss or absence, according to Alexander Regier, who shows how the "epistolary poetics" of Keats's letters "relies on an economy of fracture and reciprocal movement" (119). According to Regier, the epistolary genre simultaneously affirms connections with—and fragmentation/disconnection from—others. He explains that "the activity of writing (and sending) a letter" makes "the other and oneself simultaneously present" in that act, while the letter itself "reinforces the gap that exists between the interlocutors" (Regier 123). The exigence of the epistolary genre

is the need to communicate with an audience who is at a distance from the speaker/writer; like most if not all written text, it is a genre of delayed communication, communication deferred across time and space. The epistolary genre affirms the absence of immediate connection between the interlocutors even as it attempts to bridge that gap.

Although, like a letter, "This Living Hand" unites the speaker and the listener through direct address, it simultaneously affirms the gap between the speaker and the listener. It is precisely the gap between life and death that motivates the speaker to curse his listener. Regier explains two aspects of the epistolary genre that clarify this curse—the gift-like aspect of letters and the obligation they place on their audience to respond. The Romantics in particular viewed letters as part of "the genre of the love-gift," according to Michael Wetzel, because the Romantic letter "unites in its technical aspects of bestowing writing, addressing, dating, and transport, all the preconditions to make the desire of the other an event, to invent the other through imaginative excitement" (qtd. in Regier 127). In much the same way, Keats and Donne bestow their poems on their readers, dedicating their poems to their readers via second-person pronouns and explicit references to the speaker-listener relationships that their poems make possible. In both poems, the speaker's "desire of the other" is the "event" of the poem itself (Wetzel qtd. in Regier 127). In Donne's poem, the speaker wants the listener not to mourn, and the poem seems to function as a gift in that it re-names absences (like "breach") as presences (like "expansion," which suggests their relationship is even greater than it was before)—we may view Donne's poem as giving the gift of presence in order to prevent mourning (23).

Keats's poem, however, functions as a gift quite differently. For one thing, it asks the listener to sacrifice her own life—to give the gift of her own absence—in order to restore the speaker's life/presence. The poem makes this request through its gift-like form; it is dedicated to the listener/reader through references to her own "heart" and "conscience," and especially the threat to "haunt" her (Keats 5, 7, 4). The final lines "see here it is--/I hold it towards you" strongly connote the gesture of giving, which is often performed by hands holding something out to the recipient (Keats 7-8). The pronoun "it" in these lines has an ambiguous referent; as Brooke Hopkins observes, "it" in these lines "is obviously the hand, but it is the hand in the *form* of a poem (handwriting)" (36). Keats invites the reader to identify the image of the hand with his literal handwriting and thereby with the poem itself. The poem is gift-like in that it "hold[s]" the figure of hand "toward" the listener/reader in three respects: a fictional hand, a piece of handwriting that is a "trace" or effect of Keats's literal hand, and a poem that embodies both (Keats 8; Hopkins 35). Even though we cannot literally take the fictional hand that the speaker "hold[s]" toward the listener, we may take or receive the poem through the act of reading it and, perhaps, through our memory of it.

To receive the poem seems to signify a death-like or suicidal gesture for the reader. Receiving or accepting the poem implies the reader's acceptance of poem's curse—her willingness at least to imagine with the speaker a situation in which he would "haunt" and terrify her to the point that she would "wish [her] own heart dry of blood" so that the speaker would live again and her conscience would be calm (Keats 5-8). As long as the reader remembers the poem's curse, she sustains the possibility that the speaker

will die and haunt her. The speaker may actually haunt the reader as long as she remembers the poem, possessing her attention not only while she reads the poem, but also afterwards. The speaker may possess the reader by inviting her to identify with him—both the speaker and the reader focus on the speaker's death, an event which both may fear, especially because the speaker aims to evoke fear in the reader. By possessing the reader's attention and through evoking her fear for his own death, the speaker may haunt the reader both in her acts of reading and remembering the poem. Reading thereby becomes a gesture of self-denial for the reader, who gives her attention over to the speaker.

The poem appeals to memory through its emphasis on "haunt," a verb that connotes a kind of partial presence that endures beyond absence and death (Keats 4). Even if the hand does not literally appear before the reader, the possibility that it might, emphasized so graphically through the visceral references to the speaker's and listener's bodies ("heart dry of blood," "veins red life might stream," "icy . . . tomb"), may present an unforgettable image to the reader (Keats 5, 6, 3). The poem may haunt the reader/listener, even if the hand does not—and such poetic haunting seems to threaten, at least figuratively, the reader's "conscience" and life (Keats 7). The threat of haunting seems to imply not a "love-gift," as Wetzel terms it, but rather a hate-gift—something given to the reader, but done so with explicitly harmful motives (Wetzel qtd. in Regier 127). Keats frames this hate-gift, however, as a gesture of reciprocity, and, thus, may appeal to the reader's value of reciprocity and dialogue, albeit in a threatening way.

According to the logic of the poem, the speaker seems to oblige his listener to reciprocate the curse/poem he gives her by sacrificing her own life for him, that he might live again. This "obligation to respond" is inherent in the epistolary genre and in dialogue more generally, according to Regier; letters, as partial or fragmented pieces of dialogue, put the audience "in a position where it is necessary to reciprocate," i.e. "to produce an adequate response: another fragment" (127). Regier concludes, "The epistolary obligation to reciprocate is a symptom of the fragmentariness of language," which Keats "thematises" in his letters (126). Keats portrays a similar obligation to respond in "This Living Hand" as he appeals to a listener who presumably has a "conscience" that can be deeply disturbed by unfulfilled obligations, much like Freud's and Levinas's mournful subject (Keats 7).

The obligation to respond in "This Living Hand," however, seems very different from Levinas's description of the subject's primordial response to the other, who the subject is obliged to protect from lethal displacement. In "Dying For . . ." Levinas characterizes "the human" as a creature "in which worry over the death of the other comes before care for the self;" responsibility is "concern for the other's death . . . realized" in self-sacrifice (216-217). Keats's speaker conveys an opposite attitude; he is so entirely consumed with care for himself, for his own death, that he attempts to coerce the listener into sacrificing her life—a lethal gesture quite the opposite of Levinas's responsibility to protect the other, even at the cost of one's own life. This motive also seems to contradict the "crisis in protection" that conventionally motivates "elegiac grief" (Spargo 160). This failure to protect the listener, therefore, seems anti-Levinasian

and anti-elegiac. While Keats's speaker may represent the antithesis of Levinas's ethical subject, Keats positions his listener as one capable of fulfilling Levinasian responsibility to the other—one capable of "dying for" the other, the ultimate self-sacrifice. Keats demonstrated such self-sacrifice himself in the diligent care he gave his mother when she was ill with consumption. In "This Living Hand," Keats places his reader in a similarly self-sacrificial position by appealing both to the reader's value of connection with the other and to her fear of death in a way that prioritizes dialogue over the reader's own death.

Keats appeals to the conventional fear of death (for example, in Milton's mourning Lycidas's death, Margaret's grief for falling leaves, and the mutual mourning of Wilbur's boy and snowman) via diction that presents death in terms of physical suffering, i.e. "icy silence of the tomb," "thy own heart dry of blood," "chill" and "cold," rather than regeneration—reminding the reader of her own death, as Hopkins observes, in a fearful manner (Keats 3, 5, 4, 2; B. Hopkins 38). This appeal to the reader's fear of death serves to emphasize the even greater terror that the hand's haunting would provoke in the reader. This terror is so great it apparently cannot be described explicitly but only implied by the suggestion that the hand's haunting would cause the reader to "wish" for her own death just so that her "conscience" would be "calmed" (Keats 5, 7). By emphasizing the hand's terrorizing effect, Keats recasts his audience's death as desirable, thereby inverting the value of death as fearful. By making death desirable/appealing, Keats positions his audience as a Levinasian subject—one who would rather die to protect the other than live with the knowledge of the other's suffering.

Death would seem desirable to the listener because the speaker's hand—and the speaker's death, which it represents—so deeply disturb her "conscience" (Keats 7). This term connotes the psyche or mind, invoking both the value of peace of mind and the meaning of "conscience" as our ethical sensibility. This ethical connotation suggests that the reader may feel ill at ease for ethical reasons, as if some injustice occurred to motivate the hand's haunting. Because the poem does not indicate that the listener may have caused the speaker, however, it seems that by simply reading the poem, the listener/reader has evoked the hand's haunting herself. It is as if by engaging in the poem's dialogic situation—by receiving the poem/curse through the act of reading it—the listener has assumed the obligation to respond by sacrificing her own life in a Levinasian manner.

Despite the fear that Keats evokes in order to produce a Levinasian attitude of sacrifice in the listener, such sacrifice may be a source of pleasure for the listener. Hopkins speaks to the "deeply ambivalent" emotional effects of "This Living Hand" by emphasizing the simultaneously painful and pleasurable ways that the poem grips the reader's attention. Hopkins suggests, "It is difficult for the reader to turn his eyes away from the hand he imagines to be in front of him, although he *knows* that the hand is not there. By the same token, it is difficult to turn his eyes away from the words on the page, since it is those eyes, in the act of reading, that give them life" (B. Hopkins 37). The poem invites such focused attention both through its terrifyingly visceral diction and through the importance it places on "the act of reading" (B. Hopkins 37). When the act of reading is framed as a life-sustaining act, it may feel even more pleasurable, perhaps

in part because, from this view, the act of reading reminds us that it exercises our ability "*to be able,*" our ability to sustain personal relationships (Levinas, "Time" 42). This emphasis may make the reading experience more pleasurable (B. Hopkins 37).

Keats places great urgency on the act of reading since, as Hopkins explains, it is "the act of giving life to (almost literally, 'grasping') the writing (the hand) in front of" the reader—"only the reader's reading . . . provides [the speaker] with a 'voice'" (37). The reader is positioned not only as one who survives the speaker, but also as one who is capable of resuscitating, reviving the speaker. The poem's image of "the transfusion of 'blood'" portrays reading as a matter of life and death (B. Hopkins 37). From a Levinasian perspective, sustaining the other, protecting her from death, is one of the most ethical uses of our ability "*to be able"* ("Time" 42). In protecting the other, we exercise our human agency, our ability "*to be able*" in a way that preserves both our personal relationship to the other and the other's ability "*to be able*" as well, so that she might continue making personal relationships (Levinas, "Time" 42). Keats's reader may find pleasure in exercising her human agency in such a life-sustaining way, reaffirming the speaker's presence, as well as her own vitality, in the face of death.

The dialogic situation of Keats's poem reflects the situation of Levinasian responsibility, which, according to Levinas, "is what is meant by *dialogue*" ("Martin Buber" 67). Part of the pleasure that Keats's poem may afford its reader is the pleasure of fulfilling, at least symbolically, her capacity for Levinasian responsibility. In Burkeian terms, the "formal aspects of" Keats's poem "exercise formal potentialities of the reader"—her capacity for Levinasian responsibility (*Counter-Statement* 142). We may

find pleasure in reading Keats's poem because our acts of reading repeat or reflect our "formal potentialities" for responsibility (*Counter-Statement* 142). Indeed, especially because the poem also strongly aims to evoke fear in the reader, it seems to emphasize formal, aesthetic pleasure like that which Aristotle claims we find in imitation. As Hopkins notes, however, the poem's "aesthetic pleasure . . . is somehow inseparable from aesthetic pain," especially since Keats's speaker prioritizes his own consolation above the listener's, even at the price of the listener's peace of mind (38). The deferred consolation Keats offers his reader, however, emphasizes the pleasure of actualizing one's capacity for Levinasian responsibility—even in the midst of fear and mourning. Such responsible, dialogic consolation, therefore, seems to deflect ethical concerns about compensatory consolation that ends mourning.

Keats's Anti-Elegy

The ambiguous emotional effects and emphasis on Levinasian responsibility in Keats's poem seem to result, in part, from the poem's anti-elegiac conventions. First, the poem invites the reader to mourn before the appropriate time, before the speaker has actually died. This preemptive mourning, like the "belatedness" Spargo emphasizes, positions the reader as a mourner who is "out of step with the rhythm of his society," someone who does not cooperate in the conventions of appropriate mourning (*Ethics* 129). In the situation of Keats's poem, this non-cooperative mourning positions the reader as a Levinasian subject capable of self-sacrifice, which, paradoxically, contributes to the pleasure that the poem may afford its reader. Second, we may view this Levinasian subjectivity as effected in part by the speaker's "failed intimacy" with the

listener—the utter absence of care he seems to feel for the listener (Spargo, *Ethics* 129). This "failed intimacy" seems to make the speaker's threat all the more fearsome for his listener (Spargo, *Ethics* 129). However, this "failed intimacy" may greatly differ from the kind Spargo has in mind, which affirms that ant-elegiac mourning may take many forms, some of which may even be unexpected (*Ethics* 129).

Finally, while the speaker's "wish for reciprocity" from his listener, who he expects to return his gift-poem with the gift of her own life, may seem far from "ambivalent," we may locate ambivalence in his listener, whom may feel fear, pain, and pleasure about sacrificing her life for the speaker (Spargo, *Ethics* 129). Reciprocity between the speaker and the listener also seems reduced by its deferral across the division between life and death, a division that implies an even greater mutual absence than a letter that connects two living people. Keats's poem demonstrates how aggression, fear, pain, and pleasure may all coincide in poetic responses to loss. Mournful motives that underlie both elegiac and anti-elegiac conventions may be expressed in a variety of emotions, experiences, and dialogues. When we attend more carefully to these diverse expressions of loss and mourning, we may more fully fulfill our own capacities for Levinasian responsibility toward others.

Lyric Responsibility

Levinas identifies responsibility with dialogue when he claims, "Responsibility, in the etymological sense of the term, not the mere exchange of words, is what is meant by *dialogue*" ("Martin Buber" 66-67). His identification of these words emphasizes their shared connection to the concepts of "answerability" and of *response*, which the OED

defines as an "[a]nswer or reply given in speech or writing" ("Response"). The verb form, *respond*, means "to reciprocate; to repeat" ("Respond"). Levinas directs our attention to the concepts of reciprocity and repetition that lie at the heart of responsibility—that inform its meaning as "duty" or "obligation" ("Responsibility"). The prefix *re-* connotes repetition in its "general" meaning of "'back'" or "'again'" ("Re-"). So, to respond, to be responsible to someone, and/or to be in dialogue with someone all entail a situation of communication that involves both repeating similar ideas or common ground and preserving each person's individual differences. Repetition in difference, theme in variation—responsibility involves attending to the other's differences while still finding a common ground for connection. As Levinas explains in Martin Buber's terms, the other is one to whom I speak, not something about which I speak ("Martin Buber" 64). In rhetorical terms, the other is my audience, and in order to respond responsibly to her, I must preserve her ability to respond to me. Responsibility is also an obligation to preserve the possibility of dialogue with the other, to preserve the possibility of connecting with the other—which requires utmost attention to the other's differences, although we may never fully understand them.

Rhetoric seems important to such communicative or dialogic responsibility in that rhetoric involves focusing on one's audience. The audience is key to Aristotle's discussion of rhetoric, which he defines as "an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion" (*On Rhetoric* 37). Although Aristotle distinguishes a specific "species" of rhetoric as persuasion effected "through the hearers when they are led to feel emotion [*pathos*] by the speech," the concept of an audience is always implied

by the very idea of persuasion, which involves changing someone's opinion about a topic (Aristotle, *On Rhetoric* 38-39). For contemporary rhetoricians, persuasion may also be closely connected to Cicero's concept of moving an audience, as M. Jimmie Killingsworth explains in his treatment of appeals in modern rhetorical situations (2). Moving an audience seems equally significant in lyric poetry, although the emphasis may be more on moving an audience toward a particular emotional or imaginative experience rather than toward a political opinion or action.

Evoking emotion is a primary aim of poetry, according to Kenneth Burke, who explains, "The artist begins with his emotion," and then "translates this emotion into a mechanism for arousing emotions in others . . ." (*Counter-Statement* 55). Burke explains how art in general, and poetry specifically, "translates" the poet's personal emotion/experience into a form that creates a connection between the artist/poet and her audience (*Counter-Statement* 55). Poetry is "a conversion of one's mood into a relationship" with one's audience (Burke, *Counter-Statement* 56). For Burke, poetry is a form of self-expression through which a poet may "utter" her "emotions" in a way that "provoke[s] emotions in others" (*Counter-Statement* 53). For example, Dickinson's "After great pain" and Frost's "Desert Places" each depict a personal emotional experience in terms that invite the reader to identify or connect with certain aspects of those experiences. We may learn something about the poet-speakers' emotions and, perhaps, something about our own emotional experiences by identifying with certain aspects of the emotions they express. Because self-expressions like Dickinson's and Frost's communicate individuals' differences—differences that make dialogue possible—

self-expression seems as essential to Levinasian responsibility as attending to the other. Lyric poetry, therefore, seems as relevant to understanding Levinasian responsibility as rhetoric insofar as it expresses personal emotional experiences. Lyric poetry certainly expresses personal emotional experiences in its elegiac (and anti-elegiac) modes.

Keats and Donne both illustrate instances of responsibility in their poems, albeit they do so in different ways. Donne displays a kind of structural reciprocity in his image of the two compasses, one of which "leans and hearkens after" the first, only moving "if th' other do" (31, 28). The compasses' cooperative movement to make a "circle just" conveys a sense of response (Donne 35). The first compass "in the center sit[s]" while "the other far doth roam," maintaining its own integrity while still responding to the second compass's motions (Donne 29-30). These structural connections are in keeping with Matthias Bauer's reading of Donne's emphasis on "language itself" as the poem's "theme," although I emphasize the rhetorical implications of Bauer's formalist approach. Bauer analyzes the etymology of valediction, demonstrating that, due to the origin *valere*'s definition of "to mean, signify," the title is as much about language as about the separation of two people (101). Through these dual implications, Donne invites readers to view separation between people—such as the separation between the speaker and listener, between Donne himself and his reader—as a problem that can be both exacerbated and solved through language. Graham Roebuck historicizes the lack of sensuality in Donne's "anti-imagery," explaining that, contrary to "modern," and especially "Romantic," thought in which the senses "underwrote the modern project of knowing the material world as truth," Donne frames "the senses" as "an inferior order of

reality" lacking the "higher perception" found "in sacred love and in wisdom" (144-45). Thus Donne seems to engage non-physical ways that people may be connected with each other—such as through language and rhetorical identification.

We may view Donne's emphasis on structural relationships as coinciding with Levinas's emphasis on the structural nature of responsibility—its pre-affective, pre-volitional, pre-conscious status as a capacity that may be realized, personified through our actions and emotions. Donne seems to suggest that the speaker's relationship with his speaker exceeds, or precedes, emotion and the senses, and, therefore, their relationship is more enduring. This representation of the speaker-listener relationship may appeal to the value that Donne's reader places on connections with others. Donne's appeal seems to turn on his reader's hope that personal relationships can endure beyond capricious emotions, beyond physical separation, and, perhaps, beyond death itself.

Much like Donne insists that the speaker-listener relationship will endure despite physical separation, Keats likewise insists that his speaker will remain partially connected to the listener despite his death. In "This Living Hand," the listener cannot escape her connection with the speaker, who threatens to "haunt" her even after his death (4). The speaker claims that the listener will be connected to him no matter how much she wishes to be separated from him, no matter how much suffering his presence causes her. Only sacrificing her own life so that "red life might stream again" in the speaker's "veins" will allow her "conscience" to be "calmed;" the suffering that speaker causes her cannot be relieved by physical separation or death but rather only by self-sacrifice (Keats 6-7).

Keats, like Donne, echoes Levinas's sense that the self is connected to the other prior to and beyond all desire, emotion, or choice. Keats, however, emphasizes how impotent desire for disconnection is in actually sundering the self-other relationship, while Donne indicates that desire and emotion do not the kind of structural, non-affective relationship that connects his speaker and listener across physical separation. Unlike Donne, Keats illustrates the sacrificial, traumatic, and mournful element so definitive of Levinas's account of responsibility to and for the other. The terrifying aspect of Levinasian responsibility is that the self is responsible to the other even for her own life; responsibility for the other may demand giving up one's own life. Keats also illustrates, however, that the calm conscience or peace of mind that accompanies fulfilling one's responsibility for the other may be even greater than one's fear of death. Keats illustrates a range of emotions that may accompany Levinasian responsibility, emotions that coincide with the emotional imagery Levinas's uses to describe the trauma into which the responsible subject is born.

Both Keats and Donne emphasize how speakers and listeners, selves and others, may stay connected with each other in spite of separations caused by death and loss. Their speakers "maintain," in the face of death and/or physical separation, "a relationship that" is "still . . . personal"—i.e. a personal relationship with their listeners (Levinas, "Time" 47). Such a personal relationship "[v]anquish[es] death," according to Levinas ("Time" 47). Donne's and Keats's poems vanquish death in the sense that they change the fearful meaning that death holds both for the speakers and listeners, and for Donne's and Keats's readers. Such consolation seems ethical because it preserves a relationship with

the other instead of substituting something else for the other. In these poems, desire for or the ethical value of connections with others overshadows the fear of death. Dialogic connections between the speakers and the listeners transcend or exceed death and loss in the poems, appealing to the reader's value of such enduring connections with others. This appeal is heightened by the reader's participation in the speaker-listener relationship through the act of reading. The poems suggest that if dialogic connections can exceed death within the poems, then, perhaps, the dialogic connections that the poems enable between writers and readers may also exceed death. Even though we realize that the enduring dialogic connections that the poems promise us are, in reality, only partial—that in reality we still miss those we care about and who have passed away because our memories of them are not an adequate substitute for their actual presence—these poems reveal to us readers how deeply we value connections with others and desire their preservation. Levinas clarifies that this value of connection resonates on a level as fundamental as death.

Rossetti

Like Keats and Donne, Christina Rossetti appeals to her reader's value of connection with others in "Remember." The Levinasian and anti-elegiac implications of her poem are evident in the two contrasting interpretations of the poem that Margaret Reynolds identifies—one "nice" meaning of the poem and one "subversive" (32, 34). In the octect of the sonnet, the speaker aims to compel her reader to remember her, not unlike Keats's speaker. Much as Keats's speaker focuses on the sacrifices his death will require of his reader, Rossetti's speaker focuses on how the losses that her death invoke

for her reader, who will "no more" be able to "hold [her] by the hand" or "to counsel . . . or pray" (Rossetti 3, 8). Rossetti's rhetoric seems less vicious than Keats's, however, especially in light of her speaker's apparent shift in tone after the sonnet's turn. The "nice" interpretation is quite the counterpoint to Keats's threat to "[s]o haunt" his reader that she "wouldst wish [her] own heart dry of blood;" Rossetti kindly tells her reader, "Better by far you should forget and smile/Than that you should remember and be sad," apparently concerned that her memory not even impinge on the reader's happiness, let alone his life (Keats 4-5; Rossetti 13-14). The speaker's apparent shift in attitude—and the sonnet's turn—may not really be complete, however, as Reynolds argues when she interprets the poem's conclusion as "subversive" (34).

Reynolds offers an alternative interpretation, calling the poem "a curse, a threat" posed by a "vengeful speaker," takes a feminist shape (34). Reynolds demonstrates "that the he-listener is the chief actor in" the speaker-listener "relation," and that "if he . . . *really* remembers the truth" about their relationship, "he will be sad"—and that "he should" feel so remorseful (33-34). Susan Conley likewise finds unhappy irony in "Remember;" she suggests that the repetition of memory actually "conjures . . . forgetting" and that the speaker is ambivalent towards her lover-listener (268). These two effects invert the poem's "binary thematics:" "life is linked with remembrance and sorrow, while death is linked with the smile of forgetfulness" (Conley 269). Conley strongly resists conventional characterizations of the "spontaneity and simplicity" of Rossetti's poetry, arguing that her lyrics like "Remember" "should be heard as 'cool, bitter,' ironic commentaries on Victorian sexual and textual politics . . ." (269, 281).

More personal motives may also inform "Remember," however, since Marsh observes that Rossetti wrote the poem barely a month after a bout of anxiety that rendered the poet unable even to write down her poetry (99-100). Poetry was an important emotional outlet for Rossetti, especially when she was overburdened by caring for her invalid father at age thirteen (Marsh 39). By affirming the personal motives of Rossetti's writing, Marsh invites us to read "Remember" as motivated by more than merely political concerns. To read "Remember" as possibly informed by both political and personal motives underscores the poem's complex, even conflicting implications.

For Reynolds, the opposite meanings of Rossetti's poem "are simultaneously compatible," and I suggest that when we integrate both readings of the poem, Rossetti shows us how caring and aggressive modes of mourning may be closely intertwined (34). Her poem speaks not only to the complexity of our emotional responses to loss, but also to the conflicting ways in which we may experience and/or actualize Levinasian responsibility. "Remember" responds to loss in both Donne-like and Keats-like ways, indicating that one might respond in conflicting ways to a single event of loss. Both responses to loss that Rossetti represents, however, emphasize the importance of responsible dialogue, the loss of which motivates her speaker's elegiac mourning.

Both readings of Rossetti's poem address (at least implicitly) the speaker's sense of loss. The speaker imagines her own death when she is "gone . . . far away into the silent land" (Rossetti 1-2). Reynolds notes the ambiguity of "the silent land" and of "the darkness and corruption" that "vague[ly]" insinuates that the "speaker . . . [is] about to die" (Rossetti 2, 11; Reynolds 32). I suggest, however, that the ambiguity of these terms

affirms that the speaker may not literally be about to die. Rather, her imaginings of her own death may be prompted by an encounter with any kind of meaningful loss, not unlike the way that Goldengrove's autumn leaves move Margaret to mourn for her own mortality. For example, it could be the speaker's experience of oppression by the "he-listener," who may compromise her ability "*to be able*," that reminds her of her own death (Reynolds 33; Levinas, "Time" 42).

Rossetti herself may have felt so oppressed at times when she bore most of the burden of caring for her invalid father when she was only thirteen years old (Marsh 39). Her father's illness and the family's resulting economic strife overshadowed Rossetti's own needs, Marsh explains, and only a year and half later, Rossetti herself suffered a nervous break (43). These traumatic, oppressive experiences may have felt like an encounter with death for Rossetti, whose ability "*to be able*" was severely imposed on by her family's demands that she alone stay home with her father (Levinas, "Time" 42; Marsh 43). These experiences certainly seem haunting since after this trauma, Rossetti continued to experience bouts of malaise and anxiety—such as the one a month before "Remember" was written (Marsh 99-100). These experiences may have left Rossetti with complex feelings about—and ways of imagining—death, perhaps not unlike Dickinson, whose "mysterious fright" seems to have inspired her group of poems written around 1862, including "After great pain" (Manley 260). Like the speaker of Dickinson's poem, Rossetti may have felt or at least been able to imagine death-like feelings and attitudes. When Rossetti's speaker imagines "the darkness and corruption" when she is "gone . . . far away into the silent land," these images may connote not only death's literal

imminence, as Reynolds suggests, but also the speaker's death-like feelings or state of mind (Rossetti 1-2; Reynolds 32).

The phrase "silent land" couches death in terms of the loss of sound—including self-expression and dialogue—specifically. This phrase seems to connote a mystical place (like Hades), an attitude or state of mind (like a psychological experience of imposed silence), and the very literal space of the grave inside the unspeaking ground. For Conley these literal and psychological connotations coincide; she claims that "the poem's real interest . . . revolves less around whether the lover remembers or forgets, than around the 'darkness and corruption' of the grave and the fate of human 'thoughts' therein" (268). Rossetti's indirect reference to a grave echoes Keats's description of "the icy silence of the tomb," which similarly couches death in terms of the loss of sound, expression, and dialogue (Keats 3). This rhetoric emphasizes literal aspects of graves (i.e. they are cold and silent) in terms that appeal to readers' fears of death and of physical and/or psychological suffering (from cold temperatures or imposed silence). Like Keats's speaker, Rossetti's speaker seems motivated by her fear of her own death and of the losses it implies to compose poetry. This motive of fear seems to hold whether we invoke a "nice" reading of Rossetti's poem or we focus on its threatening subtext (Reynolds 32).

If we do adopt a "nice" reading of Rossetti's poem, then we may find her tempering her appeal to her reader's fear of death in a way that Keats does not. Both Keats's and Rossetti's speakers mourn prematurely—and, I would suggest, anti-elegiacally—for their own future deaths. Like Keats's speaker, Rossetti's speaker seems

to solicit her reader to revitalize her presence after she dies, although she does so in a much more caring manner. Keats's speaker threatens to "haunt" his listener and menacingly describes his "cold" hand "in the icy silence of the tomb," which not only threatens the listener's life, but also prevents the listener from expressing and acting on her genuine desire, presumably, to be separated from him (Keats 2-3). Rossetti's speaker, on the other hand, requests her listener to "Remember" her, a request that seems to give the listener the option not to remember and, thus, seems to preserve the listener's ability to express herself, her ability "*to be able*" (Rossetti 1; Levinas, "Time" 42). Keats's speaker, on the other hand, threatens his listener's ability to express herself and thereby inhibits her human agency in an anti-Levinasian manner.

In addition, Keats's visceral descriptions of death and the grave, his speaker's "cold" hand "in the icy silence of the tomb," emphasize the solitariness and physicality of death (Keats 2-3). Rossetti's body-less speaker, however, describes the losses that her death will cause for her listener. She characterizes her death as the time when her listener "can no more hold [her] by the hand," nor "tell [her] of [their] future that [he] planned," nor "counsel . . . or pray" with her (Rossetti 3, 6, 8). She focuses on how her death will impinge on the listener's ability "*to be able*" rather than on the way her death will extinguish her own agency (Levinas, "Time" 42). Her rhetoric may convey mourning for the pain she expects her death to cause the listener—she seems to anticipate and respond to her listener's grief in a far more caring, Levinasian way than Keats's speaker responds to his listener.

In contrast, Reynolds interprets these activities that the speaker and listener share as expressing the listener's oppression of the speaker. Reynolds emphasizes that in these activities, "the *listener*" is "the dominant party" (33). It is the listener who "does the holding," who makes the speaker "stay" when she "half turn[s] to go," who does all the "plan[ing]" for their "future" himself (Reynolds 33; Rossetti 4, 6). Reynolds suggests that the listener's "counsel[ing]" and "pray[ing]" entail "giving [the speaker] advice and asking her to do things" (Rossetti 8, Reynolds 33). In keeping with Reynolds's reading, we might take the line "It will be late to counsel then or pray" to also mean that the listener does not "counsel" or "pray" with her now—as if they speaker is pointing out that once she's dead, it will be too "late" to begin the kind of reciprocal conversation they have not yet shared (8). From this perspective, the speaker seems to mourn, perhaps bitterly and resentfully, her "*failed intimacy*" with the listener, which is, for Spargo, an anti-elegiac convention (*Ethics* 129). For Spargo, representations of failed intimacy guard against unethical assumptions that "the lost other" "was and remains knowable" in a way that might "benefit . . . the surviving community" (*Ethics* 129). In Reynolds "subversive" reading of Rossetti's poem, the speaker seems to know that the other was non-reciprocal and oppressive in their relationship; however, she also implies that she was distant from the listener, which suggests that she did not know him fully, intimately, and thereby ethically acknowledges that his difference exceeds her knowledge (Reynolds 34). Spargo helps us locate anti-elegiac, and even ethical, implications in Rossetti's vengeful implications.

Both "nice" and "subversive" readings of these middle lines in Rossetti's poem acknowledge the speaker's sense that her own death is closely tied to her connection with the listener. Rossetti's references to "tell[ing] . . . of . . . future" plans, "counsel[ing]," and "pray[ing]" describe acts of speaking to an audience, and thereby imply at least the potential for dialogue (Rossetti 8). Although counseling and praying connote acts of one-way communication, they also imply their speakers' anticipation some response from the audience. Rossetti's implication of dialogue is more prominent in the activities of holding hands and spending time together affirm the implication of dialogue (Rossetti 8, 3). By listing these activities, Rossetti affirms that dialogic activities are valuable and desirable, even if reciprocal dialogue is never achieved between the speaker and listener. In both readings, the speaker seems to mourn the loss of such a dialogic, reciprocal relationship with her listener—either because her death ended their intimate connection or because the oppressive listener failed to participate in the kind of dialogic relationship she desired. Both interpretations recognize the speaker's value of her connection with the listener; she seems to mourn the loss of a non-reciprocal relationship, not the fact that she is connected to the listener. In this respect, Rossetti seems to appeal strongly to her readers' value of reciprocal, dialogic connection with others because the appeal resonates whether we read the poem as caring or as threatening. The speaker's mourning for her loss of connection in either reading, however, ultimately seems like a kind of mourning for herself, for her own loss, more than mourning for the listener's losses. Such self-mourning seems like a motive shared by Keats's speaker—and Frost's, Dickinson's, and Hopkins's as well.

The final lines of Rossetti's poem, "Better by far you should forget and smile/Than that you should remember and be sad," seem to have both Levinasian and anti-Levinasian, caring and uncaring implications, depending on how we read the poem. In a "nice" reading, these lines seem to express "a valediction forbidding mourning," aiming to relieve the listener's grief much like Donne's poem (Marsh 100). However, Donne and Rossetti prohibit their readers' mourning in different ways: while Donne lists logical reasons why the speaker and the listener should not grieve because their relationship is only expanding, not breaking, Rossetti offers a succinct emotional appeal, asserting that it is "[b]etter" that the listener "smile" and be happy than that he "be sad" (13-14). According to the emotional logic of the poem's "nice" meaning, the speaker tries to console herself by asking the listener to remember her—to revitalize her presence after death. However, she would grieve even more if the listener felt "sad" when he remembered, so she tells him not to remember if it causes him pain (Reynolds 32; Rossetti 14). She values the listener's consolation and happiness more than her own, and her willingness to sacrifice her own consolation to ensure her listener's happiness seems like a gesture of Levinasian responsibility. Her prohibition against the listener's mourning, like Donne's, also seems anti-elegiac in that she encourages her listener to adopt an attitude toward death that seems "out of step" with the mourning of "other survivors" (Spargo, *Ethics* 129).

In Reynolds's "subversive" reading of Rossetti, the final lines curse the listener (34). The possibility that "the darkness and corruption" might "leave/A vestige of the thoughts that once" the speaker "had" convey "the darkness and corruption of her anger,

her distress, at [the listener's] conventional use of her" (Rossetti 11-12; Reynolds 33). The speaker's "anger" would constitute the "vestige of [her] thoughts," which, if the listener remembered them—"remember[ed] the truth" about their relationship—he would "be sad" (Reynolds 34; Rossetti11-12). Reynolds implies that even the oppressive listener values reciprocal, dialogic relationships at some level and would mourn his irresponsible treatment of the speaker. For Reynolds, the speaker's final claim, "Better by far you should forget and smile/Than that you should remember and be sad," reads "like a curse, a threat, a bitter promise . . ." spoken by a "vengeful speaker" who feels that the listener "should remember and be sad" about his unethical behavior (Rossetti 13-14; Reynolds 34). Alternatively, the speaker may view the listener as incapable of remembering—of being a Levinasian subject—and implicitly defines herself as the only one capable of Levinasian self-sacrifice. This reading characterizes the speaker-listener relationship in Rossetti's poem as the inverse of the speaker-listener relationship in Keats's poem, in which the listener is the one who adopts the Levinasian stance in response to an oppressive speaker.

In subversive readings of Rossetti's poem, the speaker mourns for herself, for her own hindered ability "*to be able*" caused by the listener's oppression (Levinas, "Time" 42). Mourning for the loss of her human agency seems continuous with the paralyzing emptiness that Frost's and Dickinson's speakers express. Reynolds points us to ambiguity in "the darkness and corruption" that might "leave/A vestige of the thoughts that once [the speaker] had," which may refer to "death" in the "nice version" of the poem and to the speaker's "anger" and "distress" in the "subversive" version (Rossetti 11-12;

Reynolds 33-34). These ambiguous connotations of death, of oppression, and of emotional distress point to continuity between death and death-like emotion. Like Dickinson and Frost, Rossetti seems to affirm that we may have death-like emotions and or experience when we lose our ability "*to be able*," a loss that may result from various kinds of trauma (Levinas, "Time" 42). Rossetti's speaker seems to revitalize her agency, however, by writing the poem and expressing herself.

Both readings of Rossetti's poem preserve the possibility for dialogic connections beyond death. The speaker suggests that posthumous connection may be possible when she refers to the "vestige of thoughts" that "the darkness and corruption" of death might "leave" behind (Rossetti 11-12). Whether we interpret these thoughts as caring or as angry, these thoughts may linger as a "vestige" after the speaker's death or beyond her death-like emotions, indirectly connecting the speaker and listener through their emotional effect (Rossetti 12). Rossetti's speaker implies that her listener may be haunted—much like Keats's listener—by these thoughts since they may make him "sad" (Rossetti 12, 14; Keats 4). Both speakers seem to remain partially present after death in the effects that they continue to have on others. Other terms in the Rossetti's poem also connote partial presence: "counsel" suggests discussing an issue that has yet to be settled or seeking advice about something of which one has only partial knowledge; "pray" suggests speaking to God, who is not physically present, and, by extension, any apostrophe to an absent audience (8). These two terms simultaneously connote dialogue and loss, indicating that loss or partial presence underlies dialogue.

Dialogic loss is similarly connoted by the speaker's partial presence in "half turn[ing] to go yet turning stays" (Rossetti 4). Her turn is both a going away and a "stay[ing]," a kind ambiguous or partial presence that would make room for another person. This gesture also connoted a psychological or emotional turning towards—or away from—someone. For example, in that persuasion changes someone's mind and/or moves his or her emotions, it turns him or her away from one point of value, at least momentarily, and towards another. Thus, Rossetti's description of this physical gesture also connotes a psychological or emotional effect of dialogue.

Rossetti seems to present dialogue and memory as ways of attenuating loss. Memory seems to be not only a theme of her poem, but also part of its effect on her reader. In the next section, I compare the kind of memory Rossetti evokes in her reader with the way memory and self-reflexivity affect Keats's reader. Kenneth Burke's explanation of how poetic form in general affects our experience of reading poetry helps clarify poetry's dialogic, consoling effects on readers. These effects speak to Levinas's argument in "Dying For . . ." that sacrificing one's life for another person may negate the separation that death invokes. Such "'non-separation in death'" may be a most consoling—and ethical—hope in situations of loss ("Dying For" 215).

Memory and Poetic Form

When Rossetti's speaker tells her listener that he will "no more" be able to "hold [her] by the hand," nor "tell [her] of the future that [he] planned," she rehearses activities that seem to be part of their normal, "day by day" routine (2, 6, 5). In this respect, the poem explicitly describes the very memories that the speaker asks the listener to recall,

such that the act of reading the poem is, especially for the listener, simultaneously the very act of remembering—the act that the speaker calls the listener to perform. These activities also provide a narrative context for the speaker-listener relationship that reminds Rossetti's historical readers that they are not, in fact, the implied listener of the poem. Present readers experience the activities only as a narrative and not as actual memories, as the speaker and implied listener supposedly would. In a sense, though, Rossetti's reader imitates or mimics the listener's act of remembering insofar as she reads the same words, the same rhymes and rhythms that the implied listener would.

Kenneth Burke speaks to the formal connection between implied and historical readers in *Counter-Statement*. He claims that "form . . . is . . . the psychology of the audience" because form appeals to the reader's "'potentiality for being interested by certain processes or arrangements" like "crescendo, contrast, comparison, balance, repetition . . ." etc. (Burke, *Counter-Statement* 31, 46). These patterns also "characterize" a reader's "experiences outside of art," since we may experience various kinds of crescendos, repetitions, etc. in any activity (Burke, *Counter-Statement* 143). Thus, a poem's "form is a way of experiencing" (Burke, *Counter-Statement* 143). For example, Rossetti's implied and historical readers share the same form of experience in reading her sonnet; they both negotiate the repetitions of Rossetti's rhyme scheme and iambic pentameter. Although we may identify the implied and historical readers based on their shared encounters with Rossetti's form, we would not conclude that their experiences are identical in every way. For example, Rossetti addresses an implied reader who actually

shared the speaker's experiences of holding hands, etc., although Rossetti's historical reader would not have shared these experiences with the speaker.

While Rossetti's repetitive form would have different meanings for her implied and historical readers, her form would engage both readers' memories insofar as her form functions as a mnemonic device. Her form appeals to memory in that rhymes, like that between "away" and "stay," appeal because the reader remembers the previous word and recognizes its similarity to the second word (Rossetti 1, 4). By recognizing the repetitive vowel sounds, the reader may participate in the way that "stay" imitates "away," such that the reader enjoys the poetic pattern because it simulates the kind of imitation that "everyone enjoys," according to Aristotle ("Poetics" 37).

Although the content of Rossetti's poem has different memorial and narrative meanings for her implied and historical readers, we may identify them in terms of their shared encounter with the poem's form. Keats's formal appeal, however, seems to connect his implied and historical readers far more closely. Keats's speaker narrates no past relationship with his listener; rather, he positions his listener as first and foremost a reader of poetry and his own "survivor" (Macksey 854). In his poem, the phrases "This living hand" and "see here it is—/I hold it towards you" reflexively emphasizes the act of writing, and, by implication, of reading the poem itself (Keats 1, 7-8). This meta-discourse constantly refers the reader back to the poem, to its handwriting, to the hand that wrote it—and thereby emphasizes the listener/reader's present—and poetic—relationship with the speaker. By self-reflexively reminding the reader that she is, in fact, reading, Keats creates ambiguity between the reader and the listener, ambiguity that

contrasts with the distance between Rossetti's historical reader and implied listener. Keats's implied listener and historical reader are more closely identified because Keats emphasizes their formal connection over any individual differences that would distinguish them. While Rossetti focuses on narrating past experiences in terms of her future death, Keats's speaker seems to desire connection with someone, anyone, regardless of who he or she is; thus, Keats places greater value on connection itself than on who that connection is with. Rossetti, on the other hand, seems to place greater value on a specific relationship, one with the implied listener specifically.

Keats's self-reflexive meta-discourse about the act of reading not only conflates the listener and the reader's positions, but also interrupts the poem's fictional scene. For example, the present tense of the last lines ("see here it is—/I hold it towards you") draws our attention to the fact that a poem, not a real hand, is what is literally before us (Keats 7-8). This shift in emphasis prompts the reader to conflate the hand and the poem as both possible antecedents of "it" (Keats 7-8). Although the pronoun grammatically refers to the hand, this grammatical meaning may be complicated by the reader's association of "it" with the poem itself (Keats 7-8). The hand as creator of the poem becomes the hand as itself poem. The reader's awareness of her own act of reading interferes with the poem's grammatical meaning. The reader's memory of reading the poem shapes the meaning that she deduces from that act of reading. This circularity emphasizes the reader's structural relationship to the poem, not unlike the "compasses" that make Donne's speaker's "circle just" (26, 35). In addition, the poem allows the reader to experience how memory can make meaning present where it is absent. To the

extent that the poem is already in the reader's memory, in a sense, then so too is the hand which wrote it and which it describes. By the end of the poem, the poem and its hand already "haunt" the reader who remembers in the act of reading (Keats 4). The poem and its hand may continue to haunt the reader even after her initial reading if she continues to remember the poem.

The poem's form produces in Keats's reader a haunting effect much like the one that its content threatens to invoke in the future. The poem's performance of haunting seems similar to the performance of loss that Susan Wolfson reads in Keats's last lyrics to Fanny Brawne. For example, in "I cry your mercy," Wolfson finds that "the way the syntax pushes past 'mind' to 'Losing' all but enacts that loss even as it anticipates it. The rhyme is almost lost, almost as lost as the rhyming poet feels himself to be" (64). Likewise, the reader of "This Living Hand" may not feel haunted to the point of "wish[ing]" her "own heart dry of blood," but the image of the hand may well be lodged in her memory, at least through the end of the poem, if not after reading it as well (Keats 5). This performative effect on the reader seems to coincide with Wolfson's conclusion that "Keats's last lyrics perpetuate rather than resolve the uncertainties of their formal strategies, rendering a poetry in which the dynamics of form forever inscribe a composition of 'unrest'" (82). Indeed, "unrest" seems to lie not only in the formal tensions between the present tense and subjunctive mood in the poem, but also in the speaker's "unrest" implied by his threat to "haunt" the listener and in his description of the terrifying effect he expects that haunting to have (Wolfson 82; Keats 4).

Wolfson's account of Keats's last lyrics to Fanny Brawne invites us to consider the possibility that "This Living Hand" (whether or not we take it to be addressed to Brawne) may also have been written for an internal audience as well as an external one. Wolfson explains that Keats's last group of lyrics is far more "involved in the intimacies of 'self'" than Keats's previous poetry, which Paul de Man attributes to the "'acute sense of threatened selfhood'" that Fanny Brawne evoked in Keats (57; de Man qtd. in Wolfson 57). It seems likely that Keats may have experienced such an "'acute sense of threatened selfhood'" about the time he wrote "This Living Hand," which is dated around 1819 (Paul de Man qtd. in Wolfson 57; Ferguson, Salter, and Stallworthy 850). Keats wrote "Bright Star," which was addressed to Brawne, in 1819 as well (Ferguson, Salter, and Stallworthy 850). In addition, the brother who he had nursed for months passed away just one year prior in 1818, and, according to Bate, Keats's "tuberculosis . . . began moving into an active stage by early September, 1819" (386, 616). If we consider that Keats himself passed away only two years later in 1821, then we may well imagine that Keats's sense of the precariousness of his own life may have informed "This Living Hand" (Ferguson, Salter, and Stallworthy 831).

Wolfson suggests that Keats wrote such personal poems in the end "chiefly *for* himself, as if he were seeking in the act of poetic composition a resource for personal composure, a means of imposing some measure of control on the flow of powerful feeling" (58). Wolfson helps us imagine the kind of emotional turmoil that Keats likely experienced after the death of his mother when he was fourteen—emotions probably not unlike those that the recent death of his brother may have evoked or renewed: "love,

anger . . . guilt over her fatal sickness which must have seemed the effect of his anger; grief and guilt over her death-a real 'gordian complication of feelings,' to use Keats's adult phrase for his perplexity about women in general" (Wolfson 75-76). If Keats experienced a similarly complex abundance of emotions in response to his grievous situation in 1819, he must have felt overwhelmed with emotion—perhaps quite oppositely from Frost's and Dickinson's speakers, who mourn their lack of emotion. Wolfson suggests that in writing poetry, Keats "hoped to summon a mastery of form sufficient to resist sensations of self-dissolution and uncrystallizing;" poetic form seems to have been an important "resource" for consolation for Keats precisely because he wanted to "control" unsettling emotions (65, 58).

Wolfson's account suggests that Keats may have felt in danger of dissolving under so much emotion, as opposed to Dickinson's speaker, whose subjectivity seemed fragmented by frozen, crystallized emotion. The speaker of "This Living Hand" seems to be composing the poem for himself in the sense that he wants to ensure his own preservation in the reader's memory—and/or his own, insofar as he may be a reader of his own poem. Both the hand and the poem that he "hold[s]" out to the listener/reader are intimately part of himself, his own body represented within the poem's narrative and in the handwriting of the poem (Keats 8). Like the speaker relies on the listener to preserve his presence, so too does Keats seem to rely on poetic form to preserve the emotional stability on which his subjectivity seems to depend. This similar role of audience and form coincides with Kenneth Burke's theory that form and audience are inextricably connected.

If we consider how "This Living Hand" would affect Keats himself as both writer and reader of his poem, then we may find him addressing that kind of audience he may wish himself to be—a reader who survives the malicious speaker, who can be compelled to sacrifice her life to redeem the speaker, and who, perhaps most importantly, can attain a calm conscience. Or, perhaps a poet in such distressing circumstances as Keats seems to have found himself would simply be relieved to impose poetic order onto the emotions of fear, anger, and grief that course through "This Living Hand." As if by creating syntactical patterns and condensing emotions into a poetic fragment that might evoke similar emotions in another person, a poet might release herself from emotional turmoil, at least briefly. For Burke, "a man can be his own audience, insofar as he, even in his secret thoughts, cultivates certain ideas or images for the effect he hopes they may have upon him" (*RM* 38). Burke implies that a writer may hope to evoke certain emotions, and perhaps even to reconnect with herself, (as, with Dickinson's lyric, ordering or reconnecting fragments of her subjectivity) by composing poetry. Whether a poet writes in order to create a particular connection with an external audience (as when, for example, we take Donne to be writing to affirm a close relationship with his wife) or to evoke a particular response in herself, poetry seems to aim for connection with an audience.

Poetic Form and Responsibility

The relationship by which artistic form determines the "*conditions of emotional response*" to a poem or work of art may be very similar to the relationship between Levinasian responsibility and our actual experiences of emotion, actions, consciousness,

etc. (Burke, *Counter-Statement* 47). In the case of poetry, our emotions, whatever they are, respond to the poem's form, although some emotions may align with or fulfill those conditions more closely than others. For example, the reader who responds with fear, at least on an imaginative level, to Keats's threat seems to align more closely with the poem's form than a reader who is indifferent to or uninterested in the threat. In the case of Levinasian responsibility, our emotions, intentions, consciousness, whatever they are, are responses to the other, who precedes us.

Not unlike poetic form, the other's presence, "from the start, affects us . . ." ("Substitution" 118). In one sense, this claim seems to mean that the other changes us "from the start," that from the beginning, we are shaped by other ("Substitution" 118). When read through the lens of "Dying For . . .," however, we may see Levinas suggesting that the other "affects us" in the sense of making our affects or emotions possible; here he claims sacrifice, "[t]he humanness of dying for the other would be the very meaning of love . . . and, perhaps, the primordial inflection of the affective as such" (216). Our capacity for responsibility—for self-sacrifice—reflects our capacity for emotion, according to Levinas. All our emotions, according to Levinas, are various kinds of responses to the other. Some emotions may more closely coincide with our capacity for responsibility, as when Rossetti's and Donne's speakers seem to care for their readers' grief and insofar as Keats's listener seems potentially willing to sacrifice her life. Other emotions may fail to fulfill this capacity, as when Keats's and Rossetti's speakers seem to threaten their listeners. Both kinds of emotions, however, may be responses to this capacity for responsibility.

The elegy's response to loss and aim to affirm community seem to reflect Burke's "two major 'forms,' unity and diversity," or in Bauer's terms unity and separation, or connection and disconnection (*Counter-Statement* 46). These forms of "unity and diversity" also seem to underlie Levinas's theory of responsibility since it is the other's difference that compels our responsibility to her. For Levinas, I am connected to the other through responsibility, which itself inheres in my very presence as a human subject. Responsible connection to the other is the root of being human for Levinas; he claims that responsibility is "the meaning of being" and "the ethics of its justice" ("Ethics" 86). Responsible relationship to the other is, for Levinas, the condition of being human.

Dialogue beyond Death

For Levinas, sacrificing one's life for another person seems to be the action that best fulfills our capacity for responsibility. In "Dying For . . ." he characterizes this gesture as "the very meaning of love," and he suggests that it reflects the "primordial inflection" or capacity for love and other emotions (216). In "Substitution," he clarifies that in "sacrifice . . . the absolute singularity of the responsible one encompasses the generality or generalization of death" (118). Sacrifice is one way of maintaining a personal relationship, of maintaining our human agency by making meaning through the event of death. This exercise of human agency negates the "generalization" of death and its absolute absence of meaning by transforming the event of death into a meaningful gesture ("Substitution" 118). Levinas concludes that through sacrifice, "we can have responsibilities and attachments through which death takes on meaning" ("Substitution"

118). Such enduring connections to others seems to be the hope for which mourning aims since mourning tries, albeit in vain, to maintain a connection with the lost other. Levinas admits that sacrifice in no way "take[s] from death its sting," but he clarifies that we might free ourselves from our fear of death's lack of meaning through the meaningful act of "[d]ying for" the other ("Substitution" 118; "Dying For" 215).

Keats affirms Levinas's sense that in self-sacrifice, we may negate death's meaninglessness and thereby be comforted by the presence of meaning where we expected it to be lost. Keats's speaker assures the listener that she will "be conscience-calmed" if she sacrifices her life for the speaker (7). Part of the pleasure of reading Keats's terrifying poem may come from its implication that, despite the fear that death typically evokes in us, death may also be a release from more urgent fears, like the fear of treating others irresponsibly, unethically. Keats's listener may be consoled through her sacrificial—and meaningful—death. Keats also suggests that the speaker and the listener will not be separated by the speaker's death; the speaker will "haunt" the listener, remaining at least partially present to her even after his death (4). The possibility for remaining connected to the lost other, even in spite of her loss or death, may sound especially appealing and consoling to a reader confronting the loss of a loved one.

Rossetti likewise portrays a possibility for posthumous, or post-loss, connection with the other in her phrase "if the darkness and corruption leave/A vestige of the thoughts that once I had" (11-12). Rossetti's speaker seems far less certain than Keats's that death will "leave/A vestige of" her "thoughts," that she will remain partially present to her listener (11-12). Her poem's emphasis on memory indicates that this "vestige"

may well refer to memories, although, as Reynolds' dual readings of the poem suggest, these memories may be either comforting and/or distressing for the surviving listener (Rossetti 12). Indeed, her poem itself may remind the listener of activities that he has shared with his listener, and may thereby function as a memento through which Rossetti might preserve her relationship with her ideal reader even after her death. We may also find that Donne's cerebral images of the "gold to airy thinness beat" and the two compasses emphasize the circularity—the enduring connectedness—of the speaker and the listener affirming the possibility of posthumous connections (24). Insofar as Donne may poetically address the "unity-in-separation" at the heart of language itself through paronomasia celata, he indicates that language too may provide a means of connection despite loss and death (Bauer 97). These poets demonstrate that memories, language, and certainly poetry can be ways of preserving a specific connection with another person, even beyond death. Their continued ability to affect historical readers through their poems affirms that dialogue, however much deferred, can still be extended beyond death. Such poetic dialogues create meaningful presences—connections between writers and readers—that may deflect the absence of meaning implied by death and loss.

Donne, Keats, and Rossetti achieve these dialogic effects through anti-elegiac conventions like prohibitions of grieving or premature mourning for one's own death. They mourn "*failed intimacy*" with their listeners and represent ambiguous attitudes that coincide with Freud's observation of ambivalence at the heart of the "elegiac" subject (Spargo, *Ethics* 129; Clewell 64-65). Because these anti-elegiac conventions create dialogic relationships between speakers and listeners, writers and readers, they avoid

substituting a new love object for the lost other. Instead, these poets try to maintain dialogic connections with the lost other, and thereby maintain new avenues for dialogue with readers. Insofar as these poems perpetuate dialogue, they seem to enhance readers' capacity to actualize their Levinasian responsibility to the other.

Readers seem to actualize this responsibility, at least in part, by negotiating poetic forms like rhyme and rhythm, which themselves seem to reflect dialogic relations. Burke claims that such "[r]epetitive form," like rhyme and rhythm, "is basic to any work of art, or to any other kind of orientation, for that matter. It is our only method of 'talking on the subject'" (*Counter-Statement* 125). Although Levinas calls us to attend relentlessly to the other's difference, we can only do so through common ground that allows us to engage in dialogue with the other, to respond to the other. Poems like Donne's, Keats's, and Rossetti's seem to console mournful readers by reminding them of their ability to stay connected with others, even lost loved ones. Such consolation seems to reconcile our desire to respond ethically to the loss of the other with our desire "to alleviate . . . sorrow," however enduring it may be ("Console").

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: ELEGIAC RHETORICS IN COMMUNITIES OF MOURNING

By reading mournful poems rhetorically, this dissertation expands the concept of the elegy in order to reveal continuities between private and communal modes of mourning. Rhetoric is a crucial heuristic for interpreting poetry's dialogic and community-building effects. For example, by recognizing Hopkins's "Spring and Fall: *To a Young Child*" as representative of the way that encounters with loss may remind us of our own mortality, we may illuminate narcissistic motives for mourning that underlie even seemingly other-oriented expressions of grief. To view mourning as motivated both by the loss of an external other and by a sense of one's own vulnerability to loss and death challenges Sacks's emphasis on compensatory modes of mourning—if mourning is thus fraught by varied, even conflicting motives, then it seems doubtful that a single "consolation prize" or new love object would solve the problem of grief (5). Elegiac poems connect personal and communal modes of mourning through their epideictic arguments, such as Hopkins's implicit argument that mourning for external losses, like Margaret's mourning for Goldengrove's leaves, reflects our grief for the loss of our own lives. Such rhetorical readings of poetry, however, oppose divisions between rhetoric and modern poetry supported by critics such as Lloyd F. Bitzer and Jeffrey Walker.

In "The Rhetorical Situation," Bitzer distinguishes rhetoric from poetry because he sees rhetoric as "a mode of altering reality" that situates its audience as "mediator[s] of change," whereas poetry, he claims, does not "requir[e] an audience in order to

produce its end" (4, 11, 8). These distinctions between the aims and audiences of rhetoric and poetry do not seem to hold in the cases of the poems discussed in this dissertation. For example, the desire to change reality seems to motivate the poet-speakers of Dickinson's "After great pain" and Frost's "Desert Places," who seem to want relief from their isolation and emotional numbness. Through poetry, the speakers address and attempt to connect with an audience, even if that audience may primarily be themselves. An audience, whether external and/or internal, is essential for these poems to "produce [their] end" of creating connections with others that may change the poet-speakers' alienation (Bitzer 8). Although the poet-speakers' alienation is itself fictional, it still creates a real connection with readers—a connection that may help change reality.

This connection that might not only have been very appealing to Dickinson herself when she suffered "some mysterious fright" around the time of the Civil War, but may also have appealed to her readers when the poem was published during the Great Depression (Manley 260). Kenneth Burke suggests that a writer may "cultivat[e] certain ideas or images for the effect he hopes they may have upon him," and Dickinson's speaker—if not Dickinson herself—certainly seems desperate for images and connections with an audience(s) to help end her alienation and emotional numbness (*RM* 38). An external, public audience—especially one coping with loss during the Great Depression or after 9/11—might also find the writer-reader connections invoked by Dickinson's poem appealing. For example, Burke explains in *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (hereafter *PLF*) that literature can help all of us "name typical, recurrent situations" and in doing so can show us "what to expect, what to look out for" (293-294).

Literature may thereby help us cope with encounters with tragic losses like the Great Depression, 9/11, or the death of a loved one that feel atypical and are difficult if not impossible to make sense of.

For example, Susan Hess explains how Dickinson's poetry helped her heal after traumatic childhood abuse. Dickinson's "architectural images" helped Hess reconnect with herself, especially with "the uninhibited expressions of [her] childhood," and thereby gave Hess "a path to freedom" (Hess 62-63). As Hess rhetorically identified herself with Dickinson's poetry, Dickinson's lyrics seemed to leap "from the page to meet [Hess's] mental and emotional needs and transformed" her (Hess 63). Hess affirms that Dickinson's poetry is not only rhetorical, but that Dickinson's rhetorical effects were especially healing and consoling. Because poetry and literature can thus serve as "strategies" or "*equipments for living*" for writers and readers alike, poetry, like rhetoric, can be "a mode of altering reality" that situates its audience as "mediator[s] of change"—indeed, Hess herself was "transformed" (Burke, *PLF* 302, 304; Bitzer 4, 11).

To view poems as "*equipments for living*," especially in the face of personal and national tragedies, is to qualify Jeffrey Walker's characterization of contemporary poetry as a merely "minor kind of epideictic" rhetoric (Burke, *PLF* 302; Walker 330). Although Walker, unlike Bitzer, acknowledges connections between rhetoric and poetry, affirming their common roots in antiquity, he claims that contemporary poetry lacks a "capacity for speaking across boundaries persuasively or for mounting a culturally significant epideictic eloquence that does more than simply reconfirm the group's existing pieties and hierarchies of value" (330). The community-affirming effects of contemporary

elegies, however, seem especially appealing and valuable to readers coping with loss. As the essays in *Wider than the Sky* indicate, poems like those by Emily Dickinson speak across boundaries of both time and place, appealing to readers in the midst of the Great Depression and in the aftermath of 9/11. Such poems may not "simply reconfirm . . . hierarchies of value" and community identity, but rather seem to arbitrate the definition of identities and the values in which communities are rooted, as evidenced by Gerard Manley Hopkins's argument that values of and responses to loss and death define the human community (Walker 330). By comparing the rhetoric of Hopkins's "Spring and Fall" with that of the controversies over the Columbine High School shooting memorials, we may situate poetry on a continuum of epideictic, elegiac rhetoric that includes the epideictic rhetoric of public memorials.

Public memorials such as the crosses built by Greg Zanis argue—along with elegies like Hopkins's "Spring and Fall"—about whose death is worth grieving, whose life is valuable, and who is included or excluded from the human community. The speaker of Hopkins's poem suggests that the human community is defined by narcissistic grieving, although Hopkins himself challenges this conclusion by suggesting that the speaker may be rhetorically connected to both Margaret and Hopkins's reader. Much as Hopkins challenges his speaker's emphasis on separation from others as a fundamental element of personhood, Zanis implicitly argued that connections with others are central to humane, ethical communities by refusing to exclude the perpetrators from his memorial of the Columbine shooting (Doss 311). Zanis's argumentative effect is confirmed by Brian Rohrbough's objection to it in tearing down the crosses that Zanis

built for the perpetrators—an act that argued the perpetrators were unworthy of commemoration, as if their lives were less than human (Doss 311-312). This opposition between Zanis and Rohrbough lends urgency to the issue of affirming community, which Jeffrey Walker seems to dismiss.

The epideictic rhetoric of Zanis's memorial did not simply "reconfirm" a community's values and definition of personhood, but participated in shaping and defining those values (Walker 330). Elegiac poems like Hopkins's have similar epideictic effects; like Zanis, Hopkins argues about what makes a person part of the human community. In contrast, Rohrbough argues about what excludes a person from the human community—his destruction of the perpetrators' crosses argues that murder is inhumane and that murderers should not, cannot count as members of the human community. Rohrbough, Zanis, and Hopkins all make rhetorical arguments through symbolic actions, demonstrating that poetry belongs on a continuum of epideictic, elegiac rhetoric that also includes public memorials. In making epideictic arguments, Rohrbough, Zanis, and Hopkins also seem to negotiate their own relationship to communities. For example, in building the memorial crosses, Zanis positioned himself as a member of the Littleton community far from his Illinois home, identifying himself with Coloradans' mourning for the Columbine shooting and thereby connecting a national community of mourners.

A similar community of mourners defines itself through Emily Dickinson's poetry in *Wider than the Sky*. As Barbara Dana explains in the preface, "scholars, writers, actors, poets, weavers, ministers, psychologists, and others all gathered together

to share their experiences and perspectives on the healing power of Emily Dickinson," all of whom had experienced first-hand and/or witnessed the consoling effects of Dickinson's poetry (xi). In "After great pain," Dickinson situates her readers as a community of mourners by evoking mournful responses in them, creating not only a writer-reader dialogue centered on mourning, but also the possibility for a community among her mournful readers. She also appeals to readers who identify with her speaker's alienation and absence of emotion following "great pain" (Dickinson 1). Her readers may use the poem's images as "strategies" for understanding their own mourning processes (Burke, *PLF* 297). By presenting the absence of emotion as an ethical response to loss, Dickinson affirms that the human community includes mourners who feel numbness instead of grief.

These appeals speak to readers across boundaries of time and space, as *Wider than the Sky* illustrates, creating communities of mourners not only in the midst of the Great Depression, but also in the wake of 9/11—and in response to more personal losses. Through her elegiac appeals, Dickinson has positioned herself in our cultural memory, insinuating her elegiac rhetoric in diverse communities of mourning. Because elegiac poetry like Emily Dickinson's so strongly shapes our cultural modes of mourning, we must attend to its rhetorical effects. Like the public memorials for the Columbine tragedy, elegiac poetry helps us cope with loss by arbitrating personal and communal identities through epideictic rhetoric that seems more than "minor" (Walker 330).

Short, elegiac poems like Dickinson's may be especially helpful "*equipments for living*" in part because they are memorable (Burke, *PLF* 302). For example, Mell

McDonnell describes how Dickinson's poem "'Hope' is the thing with feathers" came to her mind when, as the United 232 flight she was on started to crash, she wondered "What's the right way to die?" (65). McDonnell illustrates how Dickinson's poem helped her cope with the plane crash as it was happening by interspersing Dickinson's lines with her account of the events; she writes "The worst is yet to come—is happening now—and I cling to [Dickinson's] words. They are my only shield against annihilation" (66). Dickinson's words were "a life preserver" for McDonnell, who felt like they were "*equipments*" for survival (McDonnell 66; Burke, *PLF* 302). Dickinson's poem had this life-sustaining effect for McDonnell in part because she remembered it in the moment of trauma—and the poem is memorable not only because it is relatively short, but also because it appeal to readers' memory through mnemonic devices like rhyme (i.e. "heard" and "bird," and "sea," "extremity," and "me") and rhythm patterns (every other line of has six syllables (Dickinson, "'Hope is the thing with feathers" 5, 7, 10-12). Other elegiac poems by poets discussed here, including Robert Frost, John Donne, and John Keats, also appeal to readers' memory through such mnemonic devices. Like Dickinson, these poets endure in our cultural memory and continue to inform our understanding of loss and grief.

Poems by poets like Dickinson, Frost, and Donne also endure in our cultural memory because they are frequently reproduced in anthologies and sometimes in other literature, films, and on the internet, as, for example, in S. E. Hinton's references to Frost's "Nothing Gold Can Stay" in *The Outsiders*. Such poems are easily reproduced and alluded to precisely because they are brief, and their recurrence in our cultural

experiences—especially amidst the pedagogical urgency lent to texts that are frequently taught—enhances their memorability. Because these poems are memorable, they readily come to mind when we need names for and/or responses to situations that may or may not be typical, such as abuse or the 9/11 terrorist attack. Short, anthology poems function on both personal and cultural/communal levels as equipment for living in part because they are widely accessible in anthologies and on the web, and are referenced by other works. These poems' far-reaching appeals and effects invite further inquiry into both the rhetoric and ethics of anthologies and other situations in which the poems are reiterated. The last section of this conclusion identifies some specific topics for further research into the rhetorical situations in which these poems are used and their effects on both academic and non-academic audiences.

Anthologies themselves negotiate communal values not unlike the elegiac poems we have discussed. The anthology genre may be historically linked with poetry, as Jeffrey R. Di Leo suggests in explaining that the Greek word *anthologia*, originally meaning "bouquet," came to signify "a collection of poems" by the Byzantine era (2). Poems were the first anthologized texts, and the earliest known anthology, the *Garland*, begins with poems by Archilochus, a Greek elegist from the eighth-century BCE (Di Leo 3). Today, anthologies function as both "sites of pedagogy" and of "ideologies" because they "preserv[e] valued texts" and strive "to present the best of what has been thought and said—and already published" to students and teachers (Di Leo 4; Germano qtd. in Di Leo 4). By preserving conventionally valued texts for pedagogical purposes, anthologies provide "topologies of . . . discipline[s]" and exert "formative power" in

establishing canons through their authority (Di Leo 1). Anthologies thus seem to affirm communal values, much like the elegiac poems we have discussed.

The ideological and pedagogical purposes of anthologies are controversial for academics, who may rely on anthologies for teaching purposes but who "disdain" them from a scholarly perspective, assuming that anthologies "eliminate the difficult or provocative" (Germano qtd. in Di Leo 7). In "Anthology Disdain," Jeffrey J. Williams details several motives of academics' "ambivalence" for anthologies, most of which turn on how academics construct their professional identity (207). Williams explains that anthologies represent commercial and pedagogical presences in academia, both of which academics "distance" themselves from in their "professional self-definition as researchers" (210). Academic ambivalence about the pedagogical utility of anthologies and their simultaneous lack of scholarly value affects not only academic audiences, but also the general public. For example, Sarah Boxer reports on the production and publication of *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*—which Williams helped edit—in her 2001 New York Times article "How Lit Crit Finally Won Out over Lit" (Boxer.) Boxer contextualizes basic information about critics who were included—and excluded—from the anthology with professors' views, quoting Williams as claiming "Nortons represent the Man . . . [they] are inferior goods . . . representing received opinions, simplifying complicated views, marshaling an individualistic hall of fame, usually of great men in a fraternity" (Williams qtd. in Boxer). Boxer presents Williams's critique to a public audience, conveying that anthologizers themselves are beset with the same anxieties about anthologies that plague other academics. Boxer observes that the

Norton "is crammed with attacks on everything that anthologies depend on: paraphrase, authorship, biography, canonization, publishers," emphasizing this academic controversy to public readers. These far-reaching, ideological effects of anthologies call for ethical and rhetorical study of who anthologies appeal to and what values they arbitrate and affirm.

Such studies of anthologies have already been undertaken, for example, at a Modern Language Association panel in December 1996, some of the proceedings of which were published in *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*. Focusing on Romantic Anthologies, the panel raised ethical questions, such as those posed by Duncan Wu: "should the anthologist provide teachers with texts of works already taught, or is it more properly their job to give teachers works that they (the anthologist) thinks *should* be taught? . . . is the teaching anthology the most appropriate vehicle for canon reform? Is it right to regard the classroom as the laboratory, and our students as the guinea-pigs, on which to try new canonical configurations and new critical ideologies?" (par. 4). Laura Mandell underscores the ethical "urgency" of Wu's questions, adding that even if "junior-college and adjunct faculty do have the time to re-educate themselves for teaching new materials" incorporated into revised anthologies, these educators "may find . . . an unconscious kind of canonizing that goes on in the classroom through sheer amount of knowledge about and comfort with teaching texts that one has oneself been taught in contradistinction to material that is new and strange" (par. 3). While Wu and Mandell focus on Romantic anthologies, their questions seem applicable for other kinds of literature and poetry anthologies.

The helpfulness of Dickinson's poems and works by other canonical poets to audiences coping with loss likewise affirms the urgency of Wu's question about whether or not it is ethical to try out "new canonical configurations" on students (par. 4). Would students lose some helpful strategies or equipments for living if the poetry canon was redefined through anthologies? An equally urgent question, however, is "Are students already missing out on helpful poems that are not included in the canon?" Students may indeed be missing out, as Carey Kaplan and Ellen Cronan Rose indicate in their discussion of women readers' responses to a non-credit Women and Literature course in 1971 (38). Although the course began with a syllabus structured by the teacher, the women "took direction of their own reading and discussion" replacing male authors like Sinclair Lewis with women writers, including George Eliot, Maya Angelou, and Sylvia Plath, who spoke to their own experiences and provided "some insight into the forces that had shaped [their] lives" (Kaplan and Rose 38; Sass qtd. in Kaplan and Rose 39). The women's preference for writers who spoke to their personal experiences suggests that they wanted to read literature that they could use as equipment for living. Because these women had "nearly always read men writers in high school and college," they felt that their education had failed to teach them about literature related to their own lives (Sass qtd. in Kaplan and Rose 39). Because these women's education failed to meet their needs, their experiences demonstrate the ethical urgency underscoring questions about what texts do—and do not—get included in anthologies.

On the other hand, there may also be some pedagogical benefits for continuing to teach texts with which teachers and even some students may already be familiar. When

Mandell observes that familiarity with texts helps teachers teach, she implicitly invites us to consider that familiarity with texts may also help students learn (par. 3). Especially in the case of poetry, which can be a very intimidating genre for students, learning about poems with which they are already familiar may help ease their anxiety and feel more comfortable opening themselves up to new ideas. Students may become familiar with some short, canonical poems before they ever encounter an anthology in a college classroom.

For example, S. E. Hinton introduces young adult readers to Frost's "Nothing Gold Can Stay" in *The Outsiders*, providing a narrative lens that facilitates teenage readers' understanding of the poem. The film adaptation of Hinton's book also includes Frost's poem and the teenage characters' discussion of it, exposing film audiences to the poem as well. Neil Gaiman and Charles Vess open their award-winning, illustrated novel *Stardust: Being a Romance within the Realms of Faerie* with John Donne's poem "A Song," thus introducing the poem to readers who may not know it or John Donne's work in general and reaffirming Donne's place in our cultural memory (5). Donne's poem is also indirectly promoted through the film adaptation of the novel. Although the film does not include the poem, viewers may be prompted by the film to read the novel and thus be introduced to Donne's poem that way. Such exposure to short, anthology poems through other literary and cinematic works may reduce students' anxiety about studying poetry in the classroom and/or perhaps inspire their curiosity about specific poems or the genre as a whole.

Clearly questions about what texts should be taught and included—or excluded—from anthologies are complicated. Their ethical implications, however, demand, as Wu emphasizes, that they be asked. Asking such questions about anthologies, though, may still not be enough. Because allusions to short, elegiac poetry in popular literature and film affirm the place that canonical poems and poets have in our cultural memory, these allusions also call for ethical and rhetorical examination. Such popular allusions situate elegiac poems alongside other cultural artifacts like public memorials. Reiterations of short, anthology poems increase their memorability and enhance their effectiveness at affirming community, making these poems especially useful as equipment for living, as Mell McDonnell expresses.

The community-affirming effects of these poems may appeal to non-academic readers' desire for community—a prominent motive among common readers, according to Kaplan and Rose's attempt to describe "The Common Reader Today." In addition to the example of the readers in the Women and Literature course, who "all felt a need . . . to interact with other women," Kaplan and Rose cite the Vermont Reading Project, a reading group that brings common readers together with a humanities scholar, as a situation that "recreates a sense of community that often is lost" (Swenson qtd. in Kaplan and Rose 41). Common readers' desire "to be readers in common" may be heightened by encounters with loss, as the essays in *Wider than the Sky* suggest (Kaplan and Rose 42). Yet this collection also suggests that readers' desire for community can be satisfied with short, anthology poems like Dickinson's. Like public memorials, these poems seem to fulfill an important function of epideictic rhetoric. Indeed, the apparent significance of

these poems' rhetoric seems to call for further dialogue about their places in our classrooms, research, personal lives, and collective memory.

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